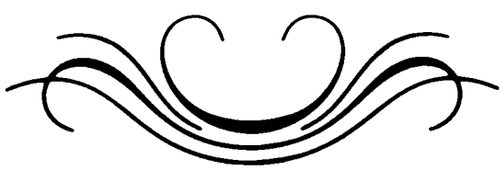
have, be,
and do
whatever
you will
or desire

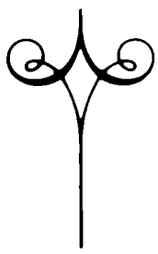
# choose freedom

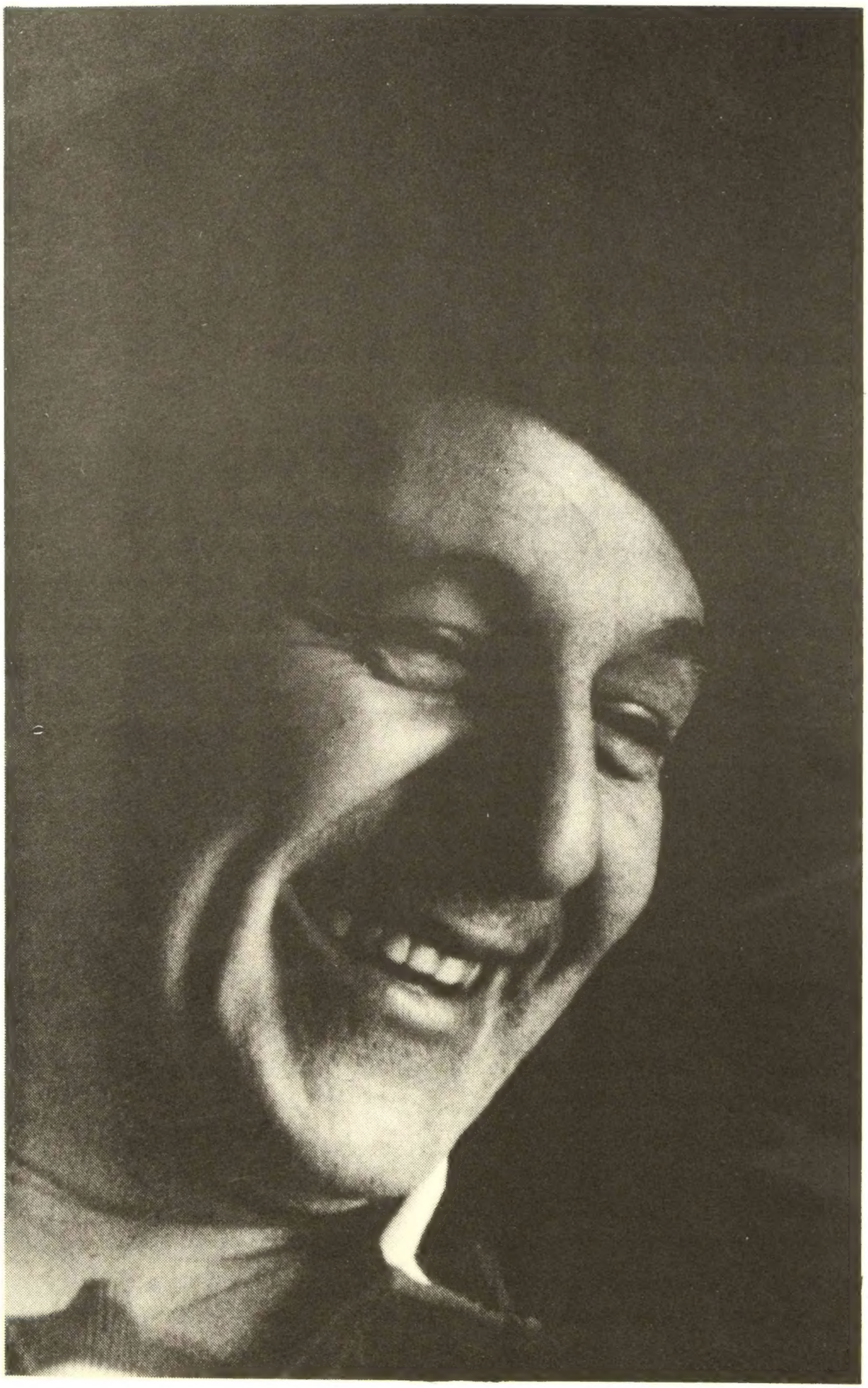
VIRGINIA LLOYD

"A BOOK THAT COULD CHANGE YOUR LIFE!"



# CHOOSE FREEDOM





Frank Prillo

*Lester*

# CHOOSE FREEDOM

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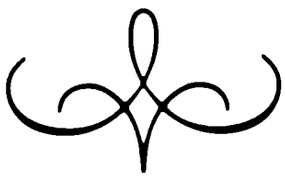

**Virginia Lloyd**

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*To freedom seekers everywhere.*

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# *Introduction*

This book can show a way for you to achieve personal fulfillment in your life. You can read it again and again, and each time, you'll find something new to help you in your quest to have, be, and do whatever you want. Everything in it is true.

It is the story of one man's journey through his own personal hell, through a life of increasing frustration to the point of despair, and its culmination in illness and a massive heart attack, when the doctor said he was finished.

That was the turning point for Lester, and he changed that death sentence into a life of intense joy and peace.

He then went on to share his discoveries with the world, devising a systematic technique called the Sedona Method, which allows others to follow his lead in their own lives. Thousands have already experienced the wonder and beauty and freedom of this simple way to eliminate the inner tortures we all go through in the process of living.

This book tells Lester's story and lays out in detail the inner process he used so that you too can begin today on your way to inner peace and joy.

# Preface

When I was a child, I was absolutely convinced that if you really wanted something badly enough you would get it. I knew that for certain.

Yet, as I grew older, my life did not always reflect that belief, and I was puzzled as to why. I had looked for the answer in various ways: reading books, talking to people who I thought might know, and experimenting with different approaches to achieve success in my work as an actress. Still the success I wanted eluded me, and so did the answer to my "Why?"

In 1967, I read a book about yoga and attended several of the many classes in New York City, where I lived. I was trying out different teachers to see if any one of them would ring a bell for me. None did, but I was telling some of my experiences to friends at a party one evening and, after I finished, one of the women suggested that I talk to Peter Waldren.

"Peter is involved in another type of yoga," she said. "They do meditations, I think. He recommended a book to me, but I can't think of the name of it right now. Why don't you call and ask him about it?"

"I don't even know him!"

"Well, your husband knows him. Peter is an actor and a writer, and your husband edited a film project for him. You can just call Peter and tell him who you are and what you want. He'll be glad to talk to you." She laughed, "He loves talking about yoga . . . he won't mind at all."

I said okay but I didn't do it right away. The conversation stuck in my mind, however, and that summer (1967) when I was under a lot of pressure trying to juggle a career, a marriage, and two children (one of them a teenager), I did call Peter and we arranged to meet the following Saturday at his apartment.

The first thing I noticed was the quietness of the place. I had been frantically rushing to get there and had arrived a bit late, feeling out of breath and disheveled. Peter sat me down in the living room and went to make us some tea. I took the chance to look around. It was a welcoming room, quiet, with a miniature carved ivory temple, books, comfortable furnishings. I could feel myself relax, and when Peter returned with the tea, we began to talk.

We discussed many things: theatre, success, problems of getting ahead, people, beliefs, spiritual growth, and realization of one's self and inner potential. Peter opened my eyes to a whole new world that day and started me on a path of exploration and self-discovery which would radically change my life. But the most significant sentence came while he was preparing us a bite to eat. He came into the living room from the kitchen, still stirring some peas in a pot.

"You'll have to meet my friend Lester."

The moment he said that, there was a click, almost of recognition, inside me, but I simply said, "Oh? Tell me about him."

Peter told me how he had met Lester Levenson for the first time. It had happened while Peter was appearing in a play starring Ginger Rogers in Phoenix, Arizona, in the late 1950's. He had heard about a meditation which he wanted to attend and had set off to find the place. He was unfamiliar with Phoenix, had gotten off the bus too soon, and was standing on the sidewalk with the address in one hand and a map of the city in the other. As he was trying to figure out which way to go, he heard a voice say, "It's that way."

He looked around to see who had spoken, but there was no one else on the street. He was beginning to wonder if he was hearing things when the voice spoke again, "It's that way."

Following the sound, he saw a dark-haired man sitting on a porch, partially hidden by some large bushes. The man smiled

at him, pointed down the street and repeated, "It's that way."

Peter walked over to him. "What are you talking about?"

"The meditation," he pointed again, "it's that way, about four blocks."

Peter burst out laughing. "What makes you say that?"

The man said, "Isn't that where you're headed?"

"Yes, but how did you know that?"

The stranger continued to smile, shrugging slightly.

Peter repeated, "How did you know?" He was intrigued, and for a moment, it occurred to him that he should be frightened of this person who seemed to read his mind, but he wasn't. He was swept with a warm, friendly feeling and couldn't help smiling back.

"Who are you?" he asked after a moment.

"Lester, Lester Levenson . . . from New York."

"I'm from New York, too. I'm just in town to do a play."

"I live out here now," said Lester, "but I lived in New York for many years. I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey."

"Really?" said Peter. "I was born in New Jersey, too." He sat down next to Lester, and they talked for a while, then went to a restaurant for coffee, the meditation forgotten. As hours went by, Lester answered more and more questions for Peter. Peter would sometimes ask but more often, Lester would just talk and the answers were there.

Time went by so quickly that Peter had to rush to get to the theatre in time for the evening performance. He got Lester's phone number before they parted, however. He was determined to pursue this friendship, and he did so through the years.

Peter went on to tell me some of Lester's story; how he had been very active and driven all his life and how, at the age of forty-two, he'd had a coronary thrombosis which forced him to reevaluate and drastically change his life. In the process, he'd achieved a degree of freedom most of us can't even imagine and was now freely sharing his experience with others.

Peter said Lester came to New York every two years or so and he, Peter, always invited a small group of people to meet and talk with him when he was in town.

The more Peter told me about him, the more certain I was that

I did, indeed, have to meet his friend Lester. But it wasn't to be that easy. He had been in New York the previous Christmas, and it would probably be another year before he would be back.

Well, I'd waited this long to find the answers, I figured I could wait a bit longer.

As it turned out, I had to. It was a whole year and a half before Lester came east for his niece's wedding. I kept in touch with Peter during that time, always reminding him to "let me know when your friend Lester comes to town." Still, I was surprised when Peter phoned the day after Christmas.

"Virginia," he said, "would you like to come to my place tomorrow night? Lester's in town, and I'm having some people over to meet him."

"I'll be there," I said. "What time?"

"Seven-thirty."

"Okay, Peter. See you then." I hung up, grinning from ear to ear and feeling as though I would burst. I had waited a long time for this. Hooray!

When I first saw him, it was something of a shock. I guess I was expecting a tall, dark, hypnotic-eyed spellbinder. Lester wasn't at all like that. My first glimpse of him showed a rather short, stocky individual with an olive complexion, warm brown eyes, and an overcoat several inches too long. I later learned that his formal winter clothes were all from the time, many years before, when he had lived in New York. After moving to Arizona, he dressed much more casually, and winters found him more comfortable in a flannel shirt, a sweater and a lumberjacket. An ancient overcoat came out of storage for the occasional winter trip east. Nevertheless, the visitor seemed unperturbed by, or unaware of, the unfashionable length as he removed his coat, gave it to our host to put away and came into the living room where about fifteen of us were waiting to meet him.

Despite my initial surprise at his appearance, I was struck by his calmness. There was a definite air of peace about him, and I got the feeling that he would be at ease and comfortable in any situation.

As I got to know him better over the years, I was to discover that no one and nothing *ever* disturbed that calm. I was to

discover a rare degree of givingness, too. I've seen Lester go out of his way again and again for people.

He has helped me, and many others, to see and eliminate what it is that blocks our ability to love and to be happy. He has dedicated his life to that work and he's uncompromising about his methods once you prove your sincerity. Sometimes what he points out strikes you as amusing, but it can also be very annoying if it's something you don't want to see. Nevertheless, I've never known him to do a selfish or unkind thing to anyone. He's free in a way that's different from what I ever imagined freedom to be. Being with him is, in itself, a growing and learning experience. I've never spent any time with him that I haven't gained from it, and I believe the same is true for thousands of others who have worked with him and used his method over the years.

But he wasn't born calm, or even particularly strong. As a matter of fact, he had a life of extreme emotional and physical turmoil. One of the things he talked about that first night was how he had found a way to change himself and his life and how others could do the same if they wanted to.

He didn't then and doesn't even now go into a lot of detail about his life. The important thing, he says, is not the problems . . . the important thing is the solution. But that night, he did mention the massive heart attack in 1952 which caused him to stop and reevaluate everything, because that's what led him to the solution. Later, I learned the rest of it.

How these problems developed over the years, even though Lester was always a high achiever, and how he eliminated and transcended them is his life story.

*Lester with his sister, his mother, and his father, 1912.*

# Part One
# The Early Years

# Chapter 1

**Lester** wasn't always a scrapper. That started when he was nine. Until then, being a good boy, he always followed his mother's gentle guidance. "Fighting isn't nice, Lester. If other boys want to fight with you, you run, Lester. Run home." And he did . . . until he was nine.

He'd been beaten up by bigger boys more than once. They picked on him because he was small for his age and because he was Jewish. In certain sections of the small New Jersey town, people hated Jews and it was most clearly reflected in the children. So Lester would run, be caught, get beaten up, cry, dry his tears, straighten his clothes so his mother wouldn't know of his humiliation, and go home.

By the time he was in fourth grade, he'd had enough. On the way home from school one day, five of his schoolmates followed him and began teasing. "Jew boy, Jew boy, run on home . . . hide behind your mama, Jew boy." He tried not to show the terror that gripped him as he strolled along, deliberately nonchalant. One of the boys threw a stone. It hit the back of his head and he walked faster. His tormentors walked faster too, becoming elated with the sport. One of them pushed him and he stumbled. Before he could catch his balance, they were on him, cursing, punching, pounding their rage. "Dirty Jew boy . . . stay home . . . don't you ever . . . come this way . . . again . . . Jew boy."

Something snapped inside him. Inwardly he screamed Nooooooooo! and began blindly striking out. His fists hit their soft bellies; his feet kicked out, connecting with chins and shins; he was suddenly a tornado of flying hands and feet. Then he was up and running, but this time, he realized with great surprise, *he* was chasing *them!* He felt a surge of power he'd never experienced before when he saw that all five were already halfway down the block. *They* were running away from *him*! He straightened his clothes and strolled home whistling. His mother was in the kitchen. "Did you have a good day, Lester?"

"Yes, Mom."

"That's a good boy, Lester. Have some cookies and milk."

He attacked the food with gusto. Cookies and milk had never tasted so good. And he was so *hungry*. "Can I have some more, Mom?"

"Of course, Lester. My, what a big appetite you have today. Just be sure not to spoil your appetite for dinner."

The boys never bothered him again. He had learned a valuable lesson in how to get along in the world. Never let *them* know you're afraid. He didn't have to fight much after that because when a bully moved into town, he would challenge the bully first. Bullies almost always backed down, even though they were bigger than he. There was something about this small Jewish boy that said he could take care of himself.

Born on July 19, 1909, Lester was the pride and joy of Jacob (called Jack) and Mary Levenson. The parents already had a daughter, Florence, who was the apple of her father's eye, but a boy to carry on the Levenson name was especially welcome. Two other children followed, both girls, Doris and then Naomi. The family was complete.

Jack and Mary were an industrious couple. They had a large grocery store with six or seven employees and spent long hours running the business. Mary had a keen business mind and handled most of the details. Jack was more outgoing and ambitious then she and loved greeting customers with a cheery

hello. He dressed nattily and was tall with dark hair and a very handsome face. Many of the ladies eyed him with more than a passing interest as they exchanged greetings, but they soon saw that he was only interested in them as friends and customers. Mary was very obviously the darling of his heart. It was there for all to see in the way he looked at her, in the tenderness with which he helped her on with her coat or extended his arm for her to hold as they strolled on the Sabbath. Standing at a curb, she would sometimes look up at him with all the love and pride in the world shining in her eyes and his heart did flip-flops even after years of marriage and four children. She was so sweet, so serene. With just a look, she could calm the inner turmoil that often plagued him.

He especially needed that calming when it came to Lester. He was so proud of his only son, so bursting with ambition for him, that the least thing out of line sent him into a rage. Super critical when anything seemed less than perfect, Jack would shout, scold, and sometimes in his anger, start for the boy to apply some old-fashioned discipline. Lester would run screaming "Mom, Mom!" and hide behind Mary, holding onto her skirts as though his life depended on it. All Mary had to do was say "Jack," not shouting, not authoritatively, just quietly, "Jack," and it would be all over. He would feel the anger ooze out of him as he looked into her eyes, into the quietness of her. He could deny her nothing. He loved her.

Her children were also unable to refuse her anything she asked. She never scolded, never nagged, simply asked them quietly for whatever it was and whether they complied or not made no apparent difference to Mary. Nothing seemed to upset her tranquility.

She had a similar effect on others as well. She was kind and non-judgmental so people felt they could tell her anything and she would understand. When someone in the neighborhood was troubled and didn't know where to turn, that person came to talk to Mary. She would put her account books aside and give the visitor her whole attention, listening, her head tilted to one side, nodding in understanding as the worst of troubles poured from the sufferer's lips. Occasionally, she would give advice if it seemed

called for. More often, she would simply listen, allowing the tumbling tormented thoughts and feelings to pour out until the troubled ones could see an answer for themselves. Or, failing that, they would at least feel lighter . . . knowing that someone understood.

And always, Mary would speak words of encouragement. "I know it will work out exactly the way you want it to."

Or, "He'll call tomorrow, just you wait and see."

Or, "I know you can do it. All you need is a little more confidence in yourself."

Her understanding dissolved religious barriers. People of all faiths came to the store to buy and they came to Mary when they needed comforting. They were all the same to her. "People are people, my son," she would tell Lester. "No matter whether they go to synagogue or church, they all hurt inside when bad things happen, and the least I can do is listen." People knew she was always there when they needed her, and they loved her for it.

She was there for her family, too. She set the tone and made the children feel secure even though she and Jack both worked in the store. There was usually a maid to take care of household details, but the children always knew where Mary was and that they came first. She would put aside any task when one of them needed her.

The family lived in an apartment above the store until Lester was eight, then moved into a house a few blocks away. The children had freedom to expand and develop their independence.

# Chapter 2

After winning the fight with the five boys, Lester was more self-confident. In his own circle, he became one of the boys, and would treat his friends to cigarettes taken from his father's store. He never felt that he was stealing, because Jack and Mary had told him he could take anything he wanted from the store. But he did know that his parents would object to his smoking, so he casually took cigarettes when no one was looking. The gang would gather each evening in the hayloft over a little stable where his father kept the horse for the delivery wagon. Ah, what dreams were exchanged. They felt like big shots then, men of power and importance, discussing the problems of the day, puffing away on their contraband Lucky Strikes.

One day when Lester came home from school, the maid was out shopping, and no one was around. "A good time to light up," he thought. Just the thing I need to help me unwind after a hard day at school."

He pulled a cigarette from his pack, struck a match on his shoe, and lit up. "How nice to relax with a smoke at home," he thought as he leaned leisurely back in the kitchen chair. He had just gotten himself comfortably settled when five-year-old Doris strolled in, curious as always.

"What are you doing, Lester?"

"Can't you see? I'm having a smoke."

"Can I have some?"

That required some thought. Women didn't smoke . . . that was a special activity reserved for men only. He turned to Doris, about to say no but she was standing there looking up at him with such trust, he couldn't bring himself to disappoint her.

"Sure," he said and handed her the cigarette. "You put it in your mouth, Doris, and suck in. Here, I'd better hold it for you. You don't want to burn yourself."

Doris sucked in on his cigarette and burst into spasms of coughing. He began pounding her on the back as she choked. He hadn't counted on this and he was scared to death. Wouldn't she ever stop? he wondered. Was she going to die? And more important, what would his father say?

He didn't have to wait long for the answer to that. The familiar, booming voice of Jack coming from the next room froze him in his tracks. "What's going on in there? What's the matter with Doris?" And he strode into the kitchen. "My God, Lester! What have you done to your sister? Smoke . . . cigarette smoke . . . LESTER, come back here! LESTER, you come back here this minute!"

He ran for the hayloft and safety. "Better lay low until Mom comes home," he thought. "She'll be able to straighten things out."

He waited in the barn until dark, then tiptoed into the house. The family was just sitting down to dinner so he washed up and took his seat. No one said anything.

He sneaked a look at Doris. She looked fine sitting there, jazzily moving her shoulders from side to side in time to some inner music as she chewed. He didn't dare look at his father, but when he caught his mother's eye, she said, "Don't give cigarettes to your sisters anymore, Lester. It's not good for them to smoke."

"I won't, Mom. Not ever again." And then with a sidelong glance at Jack, "I'm sorry, Dad."

Jack nodded in acknowledgement. No words, just the nod. It was over. Lester breathed a sigh of relief and dug into his meal.

Jack was harder on Lester than he was on the girls. He expected more from his son; he *demanded* more and was, it seemed, never satisfied with the boy. Yet he bragged about him no end when Lester wasn't around. And there were times when his open display of affection embarrassed Lester, who was painfully shy.

Jack would sometimes hug and kiss him in public. These extremes of behavior confused Lester so that he was never quite sure what to expect from his father. The two of them were at odds much of the time, and Lester defied him whenever it was safe to do so. One of those times was the incident with the steaks.

Because Jack loved to eat steak, the family had it for dinner once or twice a week. He and Mary were not particularly religious themselves, but both their fathers were rabbis and lived nearby so, out of respect for the elders, they observed strict dietary law at home. Only kosher foods were allowed at the table, even though they often ate non-kosher in restaurants.

Lester, on the other hand, was a rebel, and one day when sent to buy steaks, he brought home non-kosher meat. To be fair, his motive was more for good taste than rebellion. Fresh kosher meat was quite tough most of the time; the aged variety was much more tender. He didn't intend to tell anyone, but that evening when he saw his father enjoying the delicious meat, he couldn't resist teasing.

"How do you like the steak tonight, Dad?"

"Very good," said Jack, between bites.

"Doesn't it seem better than usual?"

"I think you're right, Lester; it's very tasty."

"Tender, too, wouldn't you say?"

"Um, yes, it is very tender."

A few minutes went by.

"Pass the potatoes, please."

"More tea?"

Then Lester dropped the bombshell. "Well, it should be tender, it's not kosher."

Everyone stopped chewing except the culprit, who continued eating as though nothing had happened. Everyone's eyes were on Jack, waiting for the explosion which never came. He simply closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them and said "Don't ever do that again" and resumed his meal.

The family exhaled sighs of relief and went back to eating. For Lester, however, the unexpected dignity of his father's response stirred deep feelings of guilt and shame. He gave up playing tricks on Jack after that.

Despite his early training in the faith of his parents, Lester

questioned everything. It started when he was ten years old and wanted a bike. He prayed every morning and evening for months, asking God to send him a bicycle. Then one day he realized that he had been praying for a long time and he still didn't have one. With that, he decided that God either didn't hear, didn't care, or didn't exist, and if he wanted a bike, he would just have to get it himself. He got a job delivering newspapers, saved his fifty cents a week salary, and when he had accumulated five dollars bought a beat-up, used bike which he repaired and rode with great delight until he outgrew it. His conclusion: You may not be able to count on God, but you can sure count on yourself once you make up your mind about something. He lived that way from then on.

Even though he managed to appear self-confident and fearless in some situations, he was never able to overcome his shyness. It caused him embarrassment more than once when the teacher called on him in school and he became speechless.

He could hear his classmates giggling and whispering, "Look, he's blushing! Look how red his face is," as he crouched deeper in his seat, trying to hide.

"Lester, I asked you a question," the teacher would repeat. Stammering and stuttering, even though he knew the answer, and unable to get it out, he would squirm until the teacher finally gave up and moved on to someone else.

All through school, including college, whenever there was an oral presentation, Lester got sick and stayed home. Nevertheless, he almost always made the honor roll by getting top grades in his written work.

In spite of his shyness, he was a precocious lover. His first romance occurred when he was five and became enamoured of a neighborhood playmate.

"Will you be my girlfriend?" he asked her one day as they played together. She smiled and spun away from him, hands clasped at her chest, holding to her heart the unexpected thrill at his words.

"Oh, yes, Lester," she whispered. After a moment, she turned back to glance up at him. He was looking into the distance, a little stunned at his easy conquest. "What should we do now?" she asked.

"Kiss, I guess," he answered, shrugging. And they did, awk-

wardly, shyly, then broke apart unable to look at each other for a while.

Resuming their game of hopscotch, they pretended nothing had happened. They were both too shy to try kissing again. Too many feelings, unfamiliar and frightening, stopped them, and they were never quite comfortable with each other after that. When his family moved a few months later, Lester was secretly relieved to be rescued from what had become an awkward situation.

For one reason or another, the family moved frequently, always in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Although most of the time the move was only a few blocks one way or the other, the children enjoyed the change. When Lester was fifteen, the family moved again to Elizabeth Avenue, and it was there that he fell in love.

Her name was Annette, and she lived half a block away. He would sometimes see her while walking to school but he was so shy he couldn't bring himself to talk to her. The person who unwittingly helped him break through this was Bernie.

Bernie was an unusually handsome boy and wild with the girls; a real ladies' man. Lester often argued with Bernie about it, his position being that it wasn't fair to the girls. They once had a fierce fistfight when Bernie wanted to make his date walk home late at night because she wouldn't do what he wanted. The boys were on a double date and parked. When Bernie pushed his girl out of the car, Lester wouldn't let him drive off without her. They slugged it out until Bernie finally said, "Okay, I'll take her home."

Still, Lester was intrigued with Bernie's successes and carefully studied his techniques. Bernie often invited both sexes to parties at his house. Lester usually went and sat in a corner, too shy to join in. But as other boys became more aggressive, the girls would run to Lester for protection. He gradually learned how to talk to them and was eventually able to hide his shyness.

It was at one of these parties that he finally made friends with Annette. When he first saw her coming through the door, he almost bolted and ran, but the thought of drawing attention to himself kept him rooted to his seat. He found a magazine and pretended to read as he felt his ears and face grow hot.

"Please, God, don't let anyone look at me," he prayed, and

breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that, indeed, no one was paying the slightest attention to him. Now he could relax and examine Annette from behind the magazine. She was expressive, alive, vivacious . . . very much at ease and friendly with everyone. He'd noticed that girls as well as boys liked her and he could understand why. There was nothing phony about her; she was just herself. His heart began to beat faster as he watched her with Bernie, who was up to his old tricks, putting his arm around her, touching her cheek, her hair, as he moved his other hand closer and closer to her breast. Then he was kissing her cheek, whispering in her ear.

Lester couldn't stand it any longer; he buried his face again in the magazine, raging to himself, "How dare he? I'll kill him, kill him!" Holding his breath, afraid he would do something to embarrass himself, he tried to control his feelings until he felt as though his head would burst. Suddenly there was a soft touch on his arm.

"What's so interesting in that old magazine anyway, that it keeps you away from the party?" It was Annette.

Trying to smile, he mumbled something about the interesting articles, cleared his throat, shrugged, swallowed, and turned red.

She chuckled, a deep little sound, and squeezed his arm ever so gently. "That Bernie is really something, isn't he? I hope you don't mind my interrupting your reading, but I wanted to get away from him for a while. He was getting so fresh. Is it okay if I sit here with you for a bit?"

"Oh, sure, that'd be fine," he answered, trying to appear nonchalant. He couldn't look at her, sitting so close, smelling faintly of flowers, a light, delicate perfume. They sat in awkward silence for a moment, then she began to talk. She was so naturally friendly and interested in people it was easy for her to ask questions, share her ideas about school, the teachers, the world; and before he knew it, he was involved in the most animated conversation of his life with a female. It was stimulating, exciting, heady, and when the party ended, the most natural thing in the world was to ask if he could walk her home. They said their goodbyes and left together, laughing at Bernie standing in the doorway, scratching his head, a surprised look on his face.

Once they were away from the noise of the party, though, he was tongue-tied again. She became quieter, too, and they walked the few blocks in relative silence. More than anything else in the world, he wanted to make a hit with her, wanted to be suave and worldly-wise, wanted to act in a way that was accepted, wanted to touch her, kiss her . . . and in his heart, felt that it was hopeless. But as they neared her house and their time together was almost over, he somehow found her hand in his. He never knew how it got there, whether she reached for him or he reached for her, but they finished the walk hand in hand, and as she turned at the door to say goodnight, he somehow managed to blurt out, "Can I walk you to school tomorrow?"

And, miracle of miracles, she looked at him with her clear brown eyes shining in the moonlight and said, "Yes." Then, after a moment, "Thank you for walking me home, Lester. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Annette."

"My close friends call me Nettie."

His heart almost stopped, tears sprang to his eyes. "Goodnight, Nettie. See you in the morning," he said softly when he could speak.

He waited until she was safely inside and the door closed behind her. Then he turned and started home, walked only a few steps before irresistibly breaking into a run; dancing, jumping, so excited he was sure he could never ever walk normally down a street again. "Will I ever sleep tonight," he wondered, doubting it. He suddenly remembered the day he had built his first radio out of an oatmeal box and some wire, with a slide tuner, a crystal and a pair of earphones. The first song he ever heard over the air was "Tomorrow, Tomorrow, How Happy I Will Be." Tonight, for the first time, he felt that it might be true. He hummed that song all the way home.

They were inseparable after that although it was many weeks before they got past the handholding stage. Their intimacy developed slowly and was so natural and complete when it happened that the normal teen-age awkwardness wasn't there. They just blended, he and his Nettie, into such a loving, caressing, fulfilling union that it never felt wrong or indecent. It was just

the way it was supposed to be when two people were in love. And they *were* in love.

They went everywhere together all through high school, and when he graduated ahead of her, they continued to go steady.

*Lester in 1912—age 2½.*

*Lester in 1918—age 9.*

*Lester in 1926—age 16—his high school graduation picture.*

*Lester with his 8th grade graduating class—June, 1922. He was almost 13 years old. He's in the first row; in the group of three boys in white shirts, he's on the right.*

*Lester's family in 1918. His father, Jack, is standing on the left. Seated: Florence, his mother, Lester, his grandmother and grandfather Levenson. His sister, Doris, is seated in front on the ground.*

*Lester (in the picture above, he's second from left, back row) with his Western Union messenger boys in 1926. He was delivery manager of the Elizabeth, N.J. office when he was 17 years old.*

*One afternoon, a local politician running for mayor came to him with a problem. It was two days before the election and he wanted a telegram delivered to every residence in Elizabeth by nine o'clock the following evening. Lester said he could do it and proceeded to mobilize his staff in the most efficient way.*

*The telegrams were delivered on schedule, the politician was happy, and Lester got a raise.*

# Chapter 3

After graduation, wondering what to do with his life, Lester heeded his mother's practical advice. "Be an accountant," she said. "There's a lot of money to be made and people always need someone to keep their books. You'll always be able to find work."

He enrolled in the New York University school of accounting in Manhattan and commuted from New Jersey every day. After half a year, he realized that accounting was neither challenging enough nor interesting enough for him to make it his life's work and he dropped out at the end of the term.

Then he heard of a full four-year scholarship being offered for Rutgers University and took the competitive exam. He won and in 1927, at the age of eighteen, he entered Rutgers, majoring in physics. At first he lived at home, but the commuting was difficult so within a few months, he moved into a Jewish fraternity house on campus. On his own for the first time in his life, he experienced a sense of freedom that was new and very exciting. The fellows would sometimes play bridge all night until the sun came up, then go to bed for an hour or two before going to class. Or they would sit around and discuss important subjects -- politics, economics, women—like those times long ago in his father's hayloft, except that now it was real, not make-believe. Now he was really a man, he thought.

And through it all, there was Nettie. Since Elizabeth was only about twenty miles from Rutgers, he saw her every weekend and for social functions at his college or her high school. They were a couple, lovingly committed to each other, and they accepted that it would always be that way. When she graduated from high school in 1929 and was accepted by the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, they were sure it would make no difference.

Things were all right for a while. They wrote each other several times a week and when he got lonesome for her, he would call and they'd spend long sessions talking on the phone, reassuring each other of their love. Then that winter, when Nettie was home for midterm vacation, they had a talk. He had brought her home after dinner and a long walk and she invited him into the parlor. Her parents were already in bed, and the house had that quiet, middle-of-the-night feeling, even though it was not yet ten-thirty. He took her in his arms and held her for a moment before tilting her head back with a finger under her chin. She pulled away, shaking her head. "I have to talk to you about something," she said.

"What is it, sweetheart? Is anything wrong?" he asked.

"Not really. It's just that something's come up at school, and I have to talk to you about it. Come on, Lester, sit down with me for a minute," she said, avoiding his eyes as she took a seat on the couch. He sat near her, apprehensive now, a tight knot suddenly in his stomach. He didn't speak, just watched her twisting a ring on her finger as she groped for words to begin.

She took a deep breath and spoke, "Lester, I get very lonesome when I'm away from you." She stopped, wet her lips and swallowed, then looked up at him, hunching her shoulders in a shrug. "I don't know how to say this."

He couldn't speak, just watched her, helplessly waiting for her to go on.

Then it came out in a rush. "I get very lonesome not seeing you. I miss you and sometimes I just think I'll die of loneliness and sometimes a boy will ask me to go out or something and I'd like to go, but I love you and I don't want you to be mad at me and," she was crying, tears streaming down her face as she twisted her hands in her lap. "Oh, Lester, what am I to do?"

Still he couldn't speak, just sat with that tightness in his stomach until she began to sob. Then he put his arm around her and began dabbing at her face with his handkerchief. "There, there, sweetheart, don't cry, my sweetheart," he said, over and over. "It's all right, darling, everything will be all right. Don't worry about anything. Whatever it is, it will be okay. We'll work it out, whatever it is."

After a while, her sobs and tears subsided as she snuggled closer into his arms, her head on his shoulder. "Oh, Lester, you're so wonderful," she whispered. "I never thought you'd understand."

"Of course, I understand, darling. I get lonesome for you, too. But everything will be okay. I'll just have to find a way for us to be together more often. Maybe I can drive over on weekends sometimes. Just as long as we stay true to each other, Nettie, I know everything will be all right."

He felt her body, so soft and yielding only a moment before, now stiffen. "Lester, I'm not sure you understood what I meant."

He felt sick. His arms had no strength to hold her as she moved away from him on the couch.

"What I meant," she went on, "is that I want to be like the other girls on campus. I want to have dates and have fun, not just on an occasional weekend when you can drive over, but all the time. I'm working so very hard at my studies that I need to relax sometimes. I just have to."

His voice was hard now, "What do you want me to say, Nettie? Just what do you want me to say?"

"Oh, Lester, don't take that tone with me. I'm not asking for the moon. I just want you to say that it's okay for me to go out sometimes for a soda or dinner with some boys from my school. That's all."

"What's wrong, Nettie, don't you love me any more? Is that it?"

"Of course I love you, Lester, it's just that I get lonesome."

"Well, I get lonesome too, and I don't want to go out with other girls."

She didn't answer for a long moment, and when she spoke it was with a sigh and a sense of finality. "Well, it's too late, because there was one boy who just wouldn't give up and wouldn't take

no for an answer. So I went for a soda with him twice and there was no harm in it. He was a perfect gentleman, and the other boys are gentlemen, too, and I just want to have a little fun while I can. But I love you and so I'd like you to say it's all right."

He didn't trust himself to speak, just got up and left. He felt like stone, as though time had passed him by, as though millions of years had passed and he had petrified. He got in his car and drove back to the fraternity. The gang was up, playing cards and drinking beer. They urged him to join in but he couldn't, just took the beer they handed him and drank it down quickly. He still felt like stone, so he had another, and another, then he got sick and threw up in the bathroom, and he still couldn't feel anything except that heavy stoniness which was like death.

He sat in his room the rest of the night looking out the window and when dawn came, pink and beautiful, bringing promise of a new day, he waited until the pink turned into winter's gray to match his soul. Then he took a shower and went to class.

He never cried over Nettie and he never got over her either. When she came to town after that, she would often call but he wouldn't talk to her. She had betrayed him, and he could never feel the same again.

He found that no one could take her place either. He tried. He dated other girls, but it was always a disappointment. He never really trusted any of them, and the stone he carried inside got heavier and heavier.

His stomach bothered him, too. It was uncomfortable enough to send him to the medicine cabinet after every meal for something to ease the indigestion and heartburn.

Then his grades began to suffer. Whereas before, he got top marks with a minimum of study, now he was having difficulty even reading the material. He felt so dead inside he couldn't concentrate.

The final blow was a letter from his father after the Wall Street disaster of 1929.

Dear Lester,

I can't send you any more money. I'm sorry.

Love, Dad

For three days he stayed in bed, getting up only to go to the bathroom and to take medicine for the stomach pains, which were getting worse.

His fraternity brothers were worried and brought him meals in an attempt to cheer him up. He couldn't bring himself to tell them about the letter because they were all from richer families than his and he was humiliated at the turn of events. The pervading thought during those three days was that he would have to leave school, and he would rather die. He even contemplated ways of killing himself and might eventually have done it, too, except that on the fourth day, a thought occurred to him that got him out of bed and back into action. He had a four-year scholarship which paid all tuition and lab fees. How could he have forgotten that? All he needed to supply were his books, which he could buy from the school at very low cost, and his board.

He got a job in his fraternity house washing dishes and taking care of the furnace, and another job in the physics department as an assistant. His duties included teaching one class a week, which he loved, and being in charge of several labs used by the sophomores. This earned him enough to support himself and he began to feel better. After all, just because his father had lost some real estate in the crash didn't mean *he* had to curl up and die. He could still get an education, the same way he had gotten the bicycle when he was ten; by working for it, by earning it.

Now, he was a man.

His class work improved after that, and his interest in girls revived. He was able to date again and really enjoy it. He decided not to get serious about any one girl, though, so he played the field and anytime he thought of Nettie, he would quickly give himself something to do to get his mind off her. If he dwelt on it, the memory of her betrayal still envoked that helpless futility and pain, followed by the unbearable stoniness. He would do anything to avoid that.

# Chapter 4

The last year and a half of college was an extremely busy time, and he sailed through it with an ease that sometimes surprised him. He really loved the hectic pace, but when graduation finally came on June 5, 1931, he looked forward to his annual summer camping trip in the Catskills more than ever before. It was a well-deserved reward for his years of work and study and he was determined to make it the best vacation ever.

He set off in his Model-T Ford with a light heart. He had made it through college; now what? There was a depression going on, but somehow he didn't feel that it would affect him and besides, he didn't have to worry about it until after the summer. For now, it was the woods and freedom.

It was midafternoon when he drove into camp at Big Indian, New York. There were Freddie and Herman, two regular camping companions since high school days. They cleared a space for him to pitch his tent and brought him up to date on things as he unloaded his gear. The big news was always about girls, which ones were camping where, which ones were spoken for, who was new in the area, and on and on. This time, they were both buzzing about June. They agreed she was something really special. So sophisticated, so elegant, so beautiful, so hard to get.

Freddie announced his claim, "I saw her first."

"Oh, yeah? What makes you say she's yours? She smiled at me. I think she likes me," from Herman.

"But she was introduced to me first, and I say she's mine."

"Well, we'll just have to see about that. I'll fight for her if I have to, but I'm not going to give her up just because you say so," Herman shouted. As usual, the conversation was animated.

Lester smiled . . . Ah, yes, summer, the woods, camping, freedom, fishing, cooking, eating, drinking, arguing and GIRLS. Well, why not get started, he thought. Why the hell not?

"I say June's mine!" he said.

They both turned to stare at him. "Are you crazy? You've never ever met her . . . never even *seen* her . . . you just got here."

"Nevertheless, I say she's mine . . . just you wait and see."

"You'll never make it to first base with her," sneered Freddie.

"She's far too elegant and sophisticated to fall for the likes of you," Herman chimed in. "She's more my type."

"*Your* type?" Freddie sneered. "And what do you think I'll be doing while she's snubbing you, you creep? I'll be dancing far into the night with her."

Wanting to get away from the argument, Lester flippantly said, "I think this camp isn't big enough for all three of us, especially after I capture June's heart." Smiling, he jumped into his Model-T saying, "I think I'll move on up the road to Oliverea and camp with Sy and the fellows there."

They started to chase him as he took off, then they shrugged and shouted, "You don't stand a chance." Lester just waved and kept going.

"Whadda ya think of that guy," laughed Herman, "he's not here ten minutes and already he's God's gift to women."

"Ah, forget him. We saw her first, didn't we? She's bound to pick one of us, Herman. Let the best man win." They shook hands on it, and went back to camp.

After making arrangements with Sy to camp at Oliverea, ten miles down the road, Lester started back to Big Indian to get his gear from Freddie and Herman's campsite. On the way, he picked up a very attractive hitchhiker who was also headed for Big Indian. They had a good time talking about the beauty of nature, the joy

of getting away from the old grind, the chance to leave routine behind and just do what you wanted, when you wanted to do it. He was sorry when they finally got to the bridge where he would have to turn off the main road.

"Well, this is Big Indian," he said. "I have to turn left down this road here."

"Oh, that's fine," she said. "I go that way, too."

When he got to his next turn-off, he stopped again; again, she was going the same way. He began to wonder, but when he got to the driveway and said "I'm turning in here," and she said "Good, I'm turning in here, too," he knew.

"Your name wouldn't happen to be June, would it?"

She turned to him with a dazzling smile. "Why, yes. Yes, it is, but how on earth could you possibly know that?"

"Oh, a little birdie told me." Wow, he thought, not an hour after making his big-shot claims to the guys, here he was, driving into camp with her. Wow! It was certainly starting out to be an interesting summer. He looked at her again, taking a good look this time. Yep, the guys were right, she was definitely a knockout.

Freddie and Herman were furious when they saw them together and tried every way they could to upset what they thought was a real hot romance. The opposition made Lester even more determined to have June for his own. So he wooed her and won her and, in the process, he got hooked. That was something he hadn't expected.

He was in love, and it excited and dismayed him. Since Nettie, he had had intimate relationships with women but in his heart, had kept them all at arm's length. He was always unfailingly kind and considerate, recognizing his need for their companionship and caring for them as friends. Being with a woman, making love to a woman, was absolutely the nicest thing he knew of but after what happened with Nettie, a part of him had shut down. Permanently, he'd thought, until he met June and it was with mixed feelings that he continued to see her. It had occurred to him at times that he might run away, go somewhere else for the rest of the summer, but there was such an attraction, such a pull, that he stayed a little longer, a little bit longer, and then it was too late. She had him.

He never let her know it. Oh, he was nice to her, he'd do anything and everything she wanted. He wrote poetry for her, gave her flowers, went on romantic moonlight swims. He did everything except fully commit himself. And it wasn't that he didn't want to. It was simply that he couldn't.

When the summer was over, he went back to New Jersey and she, home to the Bronx. They continued to see each other regularly, every weekend for months, until one Sunday he drove up a little earlier than usual and found her sitting in front of her house in a car full of men. She was talking and laughing, apparently having a good time until she saw Lester. Then she reddened, stammered introductions and after a few awkward minutes, said, "Well, so long fellows. I have to go now. Nice to have seen you."

He didn't say a word as they went into the house for her purse, but his heart was pounding and it felt as though a knife were twisting in his stomach. When they got back to his car and were settled, he turned to her.

"What was that all about?"

"What was *what* all about?"

"Those guys...hanging all over you; that's what I'm talking about. What were you doing there with them?"

"Why, Lester," she laughed, "I do believe you're jealous. Now isn't that silly? Why those were a bunch of friends that I've known for years. We all went to high school together, and I was walking home from church when they drove by and saw me. I just sat with them for a minute and then you came."

"Are you sure that's all it was?"

"Of course, I'm sure. Do I have to get them all back to testify to it?"

"No, no, of course not," he said. "Let's just forget about it. What shall we do tonight?"

Hours later as he drove home he talked to himself, "Forget it, Lester, forget it, forget it. Think about something else. It didn't mean anything so just forget it, Lester."

But the next Sunday, driving north to the Bronx and June, he felt scared. He wondered what he would find when he got there, wondered if she had been telling him the truth. He tried to forget

it, telling himself it was just his imagination, that he was reading more into it than was there and yet, he couldn't get the picture out of his mind. She had looked so intimately friendly, even flirty with those men, before she saw him. By the time he got to the corner of her block, he was in quite a state of anxiety and stopped his car to collect himself. He looked down the street to her house and there she was again . . . sitting out front in a car full of guys. Stunned, he wondered why she would want to deliberately hurt him that way—then thought to check his watch. Somehow he was an hour early and hadn't realized it. "It's just as well," he thought, as he drove past without turning into her street. There was a momentary wetness in his eyes, then his stomach convulsed with the sharpest pain he had ever felt. He pulled over to the curb until it passed, then headed for home.

That evening, as usual, he and his sisters gathered in the kitchen to discuss their day. They asked him about June. "How was she?" they wanted to know. "Was she as beautiful as she was last week?"

Teasingly, lovingly, they often probed their brother's life. They knew he liked to be private, yet with a license that comes from being a close family, they wanted him to share his life with them. Normally, he would open up but tonight, "June's fine," was all he said, and the way he said it stopped them from any more questions. They looked at each other, shrugged, and talked about their own dates.

He listened for a while, trying to forget himself in their conversation but found he wasn't hearing a thing. His stomach hurt like hell, and his heart felt like a lump of lead. Then June called on the phone. She wanted to know what was wrong, asked if he was ill and why he hadn't shown up for their date. "I came," he said in a flat voice, "early again."

"Oh," there was a long pause, then she said, "I see."

"I see, too." It was all he could think of to say. He waited a moment to see if there was anything she could possibly say to him. When she didn't speak, he hung up. He turned away from the phone to find his mother standing there, a concerned look on her face, "Anything wrong, Lester?" she asked.

He cleared his throat to give himself a moment before he could speak.

"Nah, it's nothing, Mom," he said and hurried away.

He had to get out of the house, away from his mother's concern and his sisters' happy voices, away from everyone. Abruptly he went out to his car and drove off. He didn't know where to go or what to do, he just knew that he had to move. He drove aimlessly for hours, then found himself back home. The house was dark, everyone was long since asleep. He crept in and went to bed.

It felt good to stretch out, arms above his head, legs extended to the very bottom of the bed, then he jackknifed as the pain hit him. "Damn, damn, damn." Then "just bear with it" he kept thinking "it'll go away soon." But it didn't; it went on and on. He rolled off the bed and onto the floor, hugging his knees to his chest, gritting his teeth to keep from crying out. He had no idea how long it lasted, that attack. There didn't seem to be any time, just him and the pain until it gradually eased up. Exhausted, the thought that he'd better have a checkup occurred to him just before he fell asleep. He didn't, though. He forgot about it the next day.

# Chapter 5

His first job after college was as a research physicist. He worked six months for an inventor interested in combustion engines. He loved the work; it gave him a chance to use his mind in that very special, concentrated way that had always been a pleasure for him. Exploring, digging, speculating on how a thing could be taken apart and put back together, then trying it, finding new angles to the problem and solving it; these were things he loved. He was sorry when the inventor ran out of funds and had to let him go.

His next job was for the Brown Instrument Company, again as a research physicist. After the breakup with June, he was grateful to have something to throw himself into so he worked overtime every chance he got.

There were other girls, too, to ease him over the rough spots. He never lost his shyness, but he was able to overcome it when it came to women, and, in fact, it added to his appeal. He felt strongly the need for women. Sexual desire was a powerful force in his life, and he needed the physical release to alleviate his tension and frustration. He knew that without that outlet, he would never be able to manage at all, so between work and an active social life, he managed to keep going.

He stayed with Brown for a couple of years, taking time off each summer to go camping, until 1934. That summer, he quit. There

was an emptiness in his life, a restlessness, and he didn't know what to do to fill it. Having saved some money, he decided to go to Europe.

He went by boat. The sea and living aboard a ship in a tiny cabin were different enough from his normal routine to keep him interested for a while, but by the time they docked in England a week later, he was ready for dry land.

He stayed about a month in London, going to the theatre, the ballet, exploring the museums; then he went on to the continent. Paris was first, and he stayed for another month there, absorbing the culture, learning necessary bits of the language. He liked the strangeness of it, the feeling of being alien, of observing people different from himself. It made him feel strangely comfortable and safe. He had always felt alien, as though he didn't belong, and it had never made any sense to him in the familiar surroundings of home. Now his outer situation matched his inner state and it felt good.

Leaving Paris, he moved on to Germany. Here, the strangeness was not comfortable; it held an ominous note. People did not talk to each other on the street, and when he asked questions in his fumbling tourist German, they hurried away, shaking their heads. It was very different from the good-natured helpfulness he had experienced in France. The silence and the "Heil, Hitler" from brown-shirted soldiers only reinforced the fears and warnings already reaching the rest of the world about Hitler's intentions with regard to the Jewish population. Lester had heard about it, but the reality was worse than he had expected. Quickly, he moved on to other Northern European countries, traveling from one country to another until he came to Finland.

Helsinki was such a clean, quiet city, he felt himself relax, and he decided to settle there for a while. His restlessness disappeared in the charm of the town and the warmth of the people. They were wonderful to him, a stranger in their land, and went out of their way to make him welcome.

The rate of exchange was excellent, too, and he found he could live comfortably on three dollars a week. So for several months, he enjoyed the strangeness of the country. The unfamiliar

customs, the language, everything was intriguing to him. He especially enjoyed finding ways around the language barrier with the women. What could be conveyed with a look and a gesture was often better than anything he could say in words.

He stayed for six months and would have stayed longer were it not for the telegram he received one day from Jack. Even before he opened it, he knew something was wrong. His stomach tightened, convulsed sharply. He felt sick. He didn't want to open the telegram but there it was, a yellow envelope with a glassine box clearly showing his name and address. There was no mistake. The message was for him.

He couldn't open it, could not bring himself to open it until his wild fantasies of what it *could* contain became worse than any reality could possibly be.

With shaking hands, he finally tore it open. It contained only six words, "Mother is sick. Please come home." Immediately the thought flashed through his mind "she's dying." His heart began to pound wildly; he felt dizzy and had to sit down. Beads of sweat appeared on his forehead; his whole body felt clammy and cold and he shivered uncontrollably. Then his composure broke; he fell off the chair onto his knees and began to sob convulsively, his fist clutching the crumpled yellow page as, for the first time since he was a very young child, tears streamed down his face. All he could think of was his mother. He couldn't live without her. Her gentleness, kindness and strength had been the mainstay of his life. He always knew she was there for him, no matter what. She was there to love and comfort him and being with her was always a balm. A world without her was unthinkable, it would be unbearable.

He cried until there were no more tears left in him, and still the deep, dry sobs wracked his body. He lay on the floor for a long time before he found the strength to get up and go to his bed.

"I have to go home," he thought but couldn't get out of bed. The pain in his stomach got worse and worse and he began to throw up. The next day, a friend came to see him and immediately got him bundled up and drove him to a hospital. The doctors thought it was ptomaine poisoning and put him to bed, but days

later when he wasn't any better, they examined him further and found two perforated ulcers.

The doctors worked to heal his body, but Lester's spirit was dying. He stopped eating. Thoughts of his mother, memories of her, flooded his mind. The recriminations he felt for leaving her, abandoning her, wouldn't let him sleep. He lost weight steadily and by the time the second telegram came, he was down to one hundred twenty pounds on his five-foot-seven-inch frame. He looked like a skeleton.

When the cable arrived, he didn't have to open it; he knew what it would say. He had the nurse put it on his night table, not wanting to touch it, as though his touch would give it reality. But finally, he had to open it. Only two words this time. "Mother died." He couldn't even cry now. He felt dead himself and couldn't cry. He rang for the nurse and arranged for his passage home.

But what a homecoming. The seas were very rough and to make things worse, his vessel was signaled to make a rescue mission for a floundering ship an additional four days' travel away. He spent almost the entire trip in his cabin, violently ill throughout the long voyage. When the ship docked, his sisters, Florence and Doris, were there with his father, and as he walked weakly toward them, he realized with surprise that they did not recognize him. When he spoke, they couldn't hide their shock at his appearance and hurried him home and to bed.

It was weeks before he began to regain his strength, but under the loving care of his sisters, he slowly made his way back to living.

When he was able to hear it, they told him of his mother's illness and death. Mary had contracted lobar pneumonia. The doctor had said it was only in one lung and they shouldn't be too concerned. He gave them directions for her care and visited her regularly. She was sick for a month, then all of a sudden took a turn for the worse and in one day, she was gone.

The funeral had been a surprise to all of them. People they didn't even know came to lend support, to give condolences to the family, and to pay their last respects to Mary. As they spoke to Jack and the girls, endless tales of Mary's sweetness and generosity came to light. Each visitor had a story of some way in which she had helped or enriched a life.

It pained Lester to hear the stories. They deepened his guilt, his feeling that he had abandoned and deserted his mother when she needed him. He couldn't help feeling that, had he been home, he might have somehow saved her life. This guilt, more than anything else, tormented him. He couldn't sleep, not even with sleeping pills the doctor gave him. It was more than a year before he had a full night's sleep and for many, many years, he couldn't look at his mother's picture.

It wasn't until he regained some of his strength and was up and about that he noticed the change in his father. Jack was suddenly old. He still went every day to the luncheonette he and Mary had opened after they sold the grocery store, but his habitual cheerfulness with the customers was gone. And at home, his booming voice, which had always let them know he was around was silenced. He walked more slowly and didn't seem as tall as before. Lester wanted to help, wanted to reach out to Jack, if only to let him know that he wasn't alone, but he couldn't. His own pain was frozen in him, as was Jack's. So they moved helplessly around and past each other.

As Lester's strength returned, he knew he needed to do something, anything to keep busy and get out of the house. He began looking around and finally found a job with Kelvinator in Newark, as an air-conditioning engineer. It was 1935, and he could see that air-conditioning was the field of the future. He felt there would be tremendous opportunities for him to grow with this new industry, so when he applied for the job and Kelvinator told him they didn't need another engineer, he said he'd work for nothing. This was a surprise and caused them to take another look. They decided to give him a try. Not willing to have him work for nothing, however, they started him at fifteen dollars a week.

He quickly proved his value, and his salary was raised to fifty dollars a week, top money in those days. But at the end of a year, he decided there was more opportunity in starting his own business and left Kelvinator. He set himself up as an air-conditioning salesman, engineer, installation man, electrician

and maintenance mechanic. His office was in his hat, and he used a friend's business address and phone number for messages. For the first time, he was in business for himself. It was exciting.

He started out with literally no money. The first air-conditioning job he sold was to a Red Cross Shoe store in Elizabeth. The owner asked, "How do I know this thing is going to work? Two thousand dollars is a lot of money, you know."

Lester answered, "Just let me install it. If it doesn't work, you don't pay me, but you'll have to sign the contract now." He needed that signed contract to borrow money from the bank for materials.

With that reassurance, the owner signed, the job was installed, and it worked like a dream. With the money he made, Lester was off to a great start in the air-conditioning business.

In four months, he earned more money than he had made in a whole year as an engineer. He concluded that being in business was definitely the only way to go and decided never to work for anyone else again. He would be his own boss from here on.

Then Jack died. Even though the cause of death was officially listed as mitral insufficiency, they all knew it was a broken heart that caused it. He had never recovered from the loss of his beloved Mary.

The girls were numb. It had been less than two years since their mother's death; now their father was gone too. They clung together more than ever and looked to Lester as the new head of the family, especially Naomi, who was still in high school.

Jack's death came as a terrible blow to Lester. He had never realized how much he loved his father until now, when it was too late. Then at the funeral, the rabbi took him aside and asked if he would like to read the Kaddish, the Jewish Prayer for the Dead, for his father. He looked the rabbi squarely in the eye and asked, "Will it bring him back?"

The rabbi couldn't answer. He could only stare. Lester went on, "If it will bring him back, I'll do it. Will it bring him back?"

He waited, still no answer. Lester turned on his heel and went back to sit with his sisters. He was furious now. Furious with the prayer-sayers, with the rabbi, with God. Who was God, anyway?

*Where* was God? *Was* there a God? You could prove the law of gravity. All you had to do was hold an object in your hand and let it go and you could observe the law of gravity. Where was the proof of God? As far as Lester could see, all the so-called proof was negative. When had God ever answered any prayers of his? "Never, that's when," he thought. He raged as he sat listening to the "man of God" read prayers over his father's body. If there was a God, and He hurt people this way, then Lester wanted no part of Him. He would go his own way, and take care of his own.

After the burial, he took stock of what his father had left. There was only the luncheonette, which was encumbered with $10,000 in debts, a fortune in those days. He decided that the only honorable thing to do was keep it going until he paid off the debts and could sell it.

He quickly discovered that it took eighteen hours a day to run the luncheonette at a profit, so he had to let his own air-conditioning business go. It took him about a year and a half to get out of debt, save a little, and sell the luncheonette. Florence and Doris were on their own and doing well by then. Naomi had graduated from high school and married. There was nothing to keep him in New Jersey. He moved to New York City in 1938 with a small stake and a smart idea.

# Chapter 6

He opened a very small, efficient luncheonette called the Hitching Post on Fiftieth Street, between the Roxy Theatre and Radio City Music Hall. One of the daily newspapers wrote an article calling it the smallest restaurant in New York City. It had only eleven seats. Lester himself designed the counter out of ash wood and hired an old craftsman from Germany to make the stools. The walls were lightened mahogany, and there was a fireplace in one corner. These distinctive touches gave the Post a warm feeling, and made it much more beautiful than the usual red plastic and chrome luncheonettes of the day.

Lester applied his engineering skill to the food business. His idea was to price everything very low, while keeping the profit percentage high. The formula worked and by 1941, he had three restaurants in operation and a fourth underway. He worked twelve to fourteen hours a day, which was very much to his liking. He didn't have time to think.

In his personal life, he always made time for romance, usually dating one woman at a time. It wasn't his nature to play the field, and he deeply wanted to settle down with someone he loved. So when he chose a woman to become involved with, he devoted himself to her.

Nevertheless, there was another, hidden side to him which again and again, interfered with his wish to marry. The moment the woman began to intimate, ever so subtly, that she would be

interested in making their arrangement permanent, his stomach would start to knot. He would often have excruciating ulcer attacks and migraine headaches and would begin to imagine all sorts of infidelities.

His intense jealousy and pain would force a break, and he would begin again his search for the perfect woman, the one who wouldn't betray him as he felt Nettie and June had done. He was always looking for "the right girl," thinking that when he finally found her, his problems would be solved.

She never appeared and his search continued. In the meanwhile, everything else seemed to be under control; he was making twelve hundred dollars a week and living in the Hotel Taft on Seventh Avenue and Fiftieth Street, the northern end of the Broadway theatre district.

The depression seemed to be over, and the war in Europe, though threatening, didn't stop people from an active life style that favored quick meals in luncheonettes, especially attractive ones like the Hitching Posts. Lester felt he was well on his way to his first million.

Then, in December of 1941, the United States was plunged into World War II, and the momentum of his life was suddenly disrupted. Lester was asked by the government to contribute to the war effort by serving as a marine engineer for the U.S. Maritime Commission, designing ships. He continued in that capacity for the duration of the war. At first he was assigned to the Engineering Plan Approval Division in Washington, D.C. It meant moving to Washington.

He didn't like having to leave his business and friends in New York, but there was nothing to do but go. He was allowed a month before he had to report for duty, and he spent the time getting things organized for his absence. His plan was to work during the week in Washington, then go to New York every weekend to check on the Hitching Posts. He hired a general manager to run the restaurants while he was away and drove to Washington to report for duty.

His first morning on the job, an elderly engineer beckoned. Lester walked over to him.

"Are you a Jew?" the man asked.

Lester looked at him. "Damn," he thought, "not again." Anti-Semitism had plagued him since grade school. Even in New York City, the melting pot of the world, he had frequent experiences of it. People would turn away when he told his name, or standing in line for a movie, someone would remark on his Semitic appearance. It was always painful and his first impulse was to punch out at them. But he always fought to maintain his composure because he had long ago realized that otherwise it would be a forever battle. He learned to choke back his anger and ignore the remarks and the people who made them.

But now, here was a direct hit, one he couldn't ignore. He was furious.

"Yes, I am a Jew."

"That's too bad. I hate all Jews."

That didn't make any sense at all to Lester. Nevertheless, for the first time, someone was openly voicing to him what others had covertly implied. It prompted him to ask "Why?" He really wanted to know the answer.

"Because all Jews are crooks."

"Are you calling *me* a crook?" He was hot now, could feel his whole body tense, the blood rushing to his head. The other man could sense it, too, a tight situation, potentially explosive.

"Well, all *Brooklyn* Jews are crooks," he said, trying to save face.

"I come from Brooklyn." Let's see how far you'll go, old man! Come on, say it, you old bastard! Come on!

But he didn't say it. He just looked at Lester and with a shrug, turned away.

Lester's knees shook as he walked back to his desk. The intensity of his rage scared him. He felt that he had been only one word away from killing that man.

"Killing?" he thought. "No, hitting him, maybe, punching him good and hard, but killing? Come on, Lester, pull yourself together." He sat down at his desk and really looked at it. Killing? For an instant, he saw it. Yes, he wanted to kill him, and all the other dirty bastards who wouldn't give a person a chance just because he was a Jew, or black, or yellow. He'd met it all his life . . . been turned down for jobs because he was a Jew. Gentile

friends in college would play handball with him in the gym but wouldn't speak to him at the dances. He had been beaten up, ostracized, humiliated, insulted, only because he had been born a Jew, and yes, he wanted to kill them all.

He saw it for only one unbearable instant . . . then it was gone, suppressed again, and he was left shaking at his desk. His hand shook as he held it to his forehead. He realized his head was pounding, throbbing with pain, and he felt a little nauseated. How could these guys be fighting Hitler and still share Hitler's hatred of Jews? Bigots like that old engineer ought to go on over to Germany, he thought. That's where they belong.

His superior appeared just then with some papers for him, and he got busy. By lunch time, he had all but forgotten the morning's confrontation. He and the man never spoke again. It was just as well, he figured. Better to leave well enough alone.

His wartime life was frantic. He was trying to do his job in Washington and still hold his restaurants together. After finishing work at one o'clock every Saturday afternoon, he drove to New York to check on things. Then Sunday night, he drove back to Washington in time for work on Monday morning.

During the week, however, he seemed to have a lot of free time. He wasn't accustomed to working only regular office hours, having worked fourteen hours a day for so long, and he didn't know what to do with himself. He started spending a lot of time in bars and drinking too much.

He was still taking sleeping pills, too. His sleep had never normalized after his mother's death and he needed the medication, now more than ever, to slow down his racing mind each night. Then he needed benzedrine sulphate on weekends in New York to keep him awake so he could get everything done in the short time he had.

Migraine headaches plagued him, too, and his doctor finally prescribed a pain killer.

The hectic, seven-days-a-week schedule went on for months. He began to realize that trying to run the restaurants via long distance didn't work. Without him on hand to supervise the operation, things began to slip, profits fell, and in the fall of 1942, he sold the restaurants for what he could get, which was a price

far below their potential value. It was quite a blow, and the next weekend, he went out and got rip-roaring drunk. He woke up Monday morning with the worst migraine headache ever.

Things got worse after that. With weekend time on his hands, he became a steady customer of one of the bars near his hotel. Movies two or three times a week helped to occupy his mind and of course, women. Always women.

He found it increasingly difficult to relate to people. On the job, this proved to be a problem. For example, when one of the engineers was outlining a new project, Lester was so tense and uptight that he couldn't talk... couldn't ask questions... couldn't respond... until finally the man said, "Well, it's no use talking to you," and left him sitting there.

With women, at least there was sex, and he didn't have to talk.

Then one day, he was walking home and came to a spot where the road went under a railroad bridge. He stopped and looked at that bridge... he'd never even noticed it before but today, he stopped and looked.

"What if it collapses while I'm under it?" he thought. He tried to reason with himself. As an engineer, he knew it was impossible for the bridge to collapse with no cause, there wasn't even a train on it, yet he could not walk under it. His whole body trembling with fear, he went a very long way around to get home and continued to use the long way from then on. He knew it was irrational but couldn't help himself. He felt he was going insane, and read all the psychology books he could get his hands on to see if he could find a way out.

Then buildings started closing in on him. Every time he walked down a street of tall buildings, he could feel it. It panicked him and he felt he had to get out of Washington, so he applied for a transfer. When it came through, he left for his new assignment in Philadelphia with a great sense of relief. At least he'd have new surroundings; maybe that would help.

It did for a while, but when the irrational fears started to get out of hand again, he began to see a psychoanalyst four times a week. He felt as though he were drowning, fighting for his life, and any small relief was at least something to hold on to.

After about a year in Philadelphia, he managed to get trans-

ferred back home to New York City. He was to report to the U.S
Office of Engineers at 120 Wall Street. A sense of elation cam
over him and for the first time in years, he felt hopeful. Home
. family . . . old friends . . . familiar places . . . theatre . . . the ballet
. . . dance halls . . . concerts . . . he hadn't realized how much h
missed all those things until now, when he was about to hav
them again. He sat down in his room and cried with relief. Hom
He could hardly wait.

# Chapter 7

**Lester's** sisters were very happy to have him home again and organized a big family get-together. There were husbands and children now. The family had grown.

He looked up old friends too; Freddie and Joe and Herman from camping days; Milton, his closest friend from high school and college; and others.

Things were better. He found an apartment on West 23rd Street and furnished it to suit himself. It was his first real apartment. He'd always lived in hotels after he left home and college, and it was an exciting project for him. He found a psychiatrist in New York, an elderly Viennese doctor who had been an associate of Sigmund Freud, and continued his analysis. It was expensive, but it was his only hope of keeping his sanity, so he felt it was money well spent.

There were plenty of interesting activities available in the city and he kept himself very busy. He hung around with an artistic group of singers, dancers, actors, and musicians who liked to get together evenings in Greenwich Village; he saw his sisters every weekend; and he was generally able to keep his head above water and his grip on the world.

Then one day in 1944, the abdominal pain which had periodically plagued him since college days became so severe that he stopped in the nearest doctor's office on his lunch hour and asked

for something to kill the pain. The doctor suggested that Lester check into a hospital for tests since it looked to him like acute appendicitis. That scared Lester enough to enter the hospital, but when the blood count indicated that it might really be appendicitis, and the doctor recommended an immediate operation, he balked. "Let me think it over for a while," he said.

"Okay," said the doctor. "But don't wait too long. If your appendix were to burst, it would present a very serious and life-threatening situation. There could be very serious consequences."

The minute the doctor was out of the room, Lester called an old friend, Bill, who was now a doctor practicing in New Jersey.

"Listen, Bill, they tell me I might have appendicitis and that I should have an immediate operation. How can I tell for sure if they're right?"

"What was your blood count?" Bill asked. When Lester told him, he answered, "That's not high enough to be conclusive . . . Here's what you do. Lie flat on the bed and place your right hand over where your appendix would be. Press slowly in with your fingers, then let go abruptly. That should tell you whether it is or not."

"But how will I know if it's my appendix?"

"Don't worry, if it's your appendix, you'll know. Good luck and let me know how it turns out."

"Thanks, Bill."

"Well," he thought, "no time like the present." He settled himself flat in the bed and followed Bill's instructions. He slowly pressed down on the area over his appendix and then suddenly let go. "Ouch," he screamed! He almost fainted from the sharp stab of pain. He tried it again, and again the pain was excruciating. He felt panic now, remembering all the medical books he had read, remembering cases of people with burst appendix who had died of peritonitis, remembering hearing of people who had died on the way to the hospital with ruptured appendix . . . "Oh, my God," he muttered, "what am I waiting for?" He jumped out of bed in his short hospital gown and went looking for the doctor. "Where's Dr. Teitelman?" he said to the nurse in the hall.

"I just saw him going toward the elevator."

"Thanks," and off he went before she could stop him.

"Which way did Dr. Teitelman go?" he asked the nurse at the desk near the elevator.

Without looking up from her papers, she answered, "Up to maternity. Fourth floor."

"Thanks." Into the elevator and to the fourth floor he went. He ran into the maternity ward, but there was no doctor in sight so he headed for the one nurse in the ward and asked for the doctor. When she saw his undressed condition and the wild look in his eyes, she tried to calm him down and asked him to go back to his room immediately.

"But you don't understand," he pleaded, following her as she hurried to her station and unlocked the medicine cabinet. "I could die, my appendix could burst, I need an immediate operation, right now, there's no time to waste." He didn't see the hypodermic needle in her hand until it was too late. She quickly injected something into his arm.

"If you don't get back to your room this instant," she said, "you will fall over unconscious where you stand. I've just given you something to put you to sleep for a little while until we can get this whole thing straightened out."

He ran, scared as hell; all he could think of was that it was too late, they'd never get to him in time now and this was the end. He had to get to the doctor somehow before he collapsed. As he ran down the hall, he could hear the nurse behind him shouting for the orderly. His head started to spin, and the last thing he remembered was the floor approaching as he fell.

When he woke up, he was in his bed and two orderlies were there with a flat stretcher on wheels beside the bed. They told him he was scheduled for immediate surgery and asked him to sign the release so they could take him to the operating room. "You bet I'll sign the release," he said. "Where is it?" They produced the papers, he signed, and in one leap he went from the bed to the stretcher, surprising the orderlies. They had never before seen anyone so eager to be operated on. What they didn't know was how grateful he was to have this chance to live. As lousy as his life was, he realized he wasn't ready to give it up without one hell of a struggle.

The surgeon later told him that the whole area near his appendix was inflamed but that the organ itself had long since disintegrated and become encrusted onto the intestines. The operation consisted of scraping off the old gangrenous tissue and cleaning the area. He thought he at last knew the truth about all those nights of rolling on the floor with pain; they were most likely appendicitis attacks. He'd always thought they were just severe indigestion. He lay for weeks with two tubes in his abdomen draining the infection. When they were finally removed, he felt like a free man again, and it wasn't long before he was back to his full strength and his usual routine.

The war ended in 1945, and he was discharged with thanks for his contribution to the war effort.

Dr. Bluhm, his psychoanalyst, also discharged him that year with the comment that "Some people just cannot be helped." Lester had sensed that something like that was coming. Once, the doctor had gotten angry with him and loudly said, "You're wasting time! You must let things come out more freely." He had tried harder after that to "let things come out more freely" and thought at times that he was doing so, but it was never enough and after a while, the doctor gently suggested that he quit analysis. He refused . . . this was his only life line . . . his only connection with sanity . . . he couldn't let it go . . . so he refused and continued to go four times a week, to talk and talk and talk . . . until Dr. Bluhm finally told him, as diplomatically as he could, that some people cannot be helped.

He looked back over the years. For years he had been coming each week, and there was nothing to show for it except a pile of cancelled checks. His life had not changed; it was substantially the same. He still took phenobarbitol for sleeping, benzedrine sulphate as a stimulant, and pain killers for migraine. At times, he still felt buildings closing in, suffocating him. He still couldn't walk under a bridge and even had trouble getting into elevators. He realized the doctor was right. "Some people cannot be helped" he thought, "so what's the use?" At least he could save himself the expense. He thanked Dr. Bluhm (he didn't know for what) and left.

# Chapter 8

With the war over and his sisters busy with their own families there was nothing to keep Lester in New York. He had even given up his dream of finding the perfect woman to marry and had resigned himself to having friendly, non-involved relationships with nice, respectable women who were wanting the same kind of arrangement. With that agreement on both sides, no one got hurt. They enjoyed sex without illusions. As for Lester, it was a necessity to relieve tension. It was the one thing that hadn't disappointed him; it always helped.

The only thing that seemed to give any meaning to his life now, after all these years, was money, the symbol of success. Where he could make the most money in the shortest possible time became his first priority. Lumber, he found, was in short supply. When he heard of some that was available in Canada, he drove there at high speed all the way and became a lumber broker.

The new routine was very much to his liking. As in the old days of the Hitching Post, he was working sixteen hours a day and driving thousands of miles a week looking for lumber. He was working hard, dealing shrewdly, and it paid off. He started to make big money until the Canadian lumber brokers became aware of him. He was the only American in business there who was by-passing them by paying the sawmillers premium prices so

that he always got first choice on their best lumber. To combat this, the brokers got together and devised a scheme to keep him continuously tied up in court.

He fought the first case they took him to court on, and would have beaten them. But his lawyer pointed out that even though he might win, the brokers could and would start a new case every time an old one was concluded. They would keep him so busy fighting for his rights in court that he'd have no time to conduct his business.

He realized he was licked and decided to move on. He traveled to San Francisco, then to Oregon where someone told him of a sawmill and planing mill he could buy in the small New Mexico town of Magdalena.

He went there and bought the mills from the bank for one dollar, with the promise that he would pay off the mills' $120,000 debt to the bank with the first profits. He was in business again.

It was a difficult operation, and he didn't know the business. It took all his time and energy but he liked that. It didn't give him time to think. He was learning everything as he went along, reading, talking to the old-timers, asking questions . . . it made him feel alive again for a while.

The mills seemed always on the verge of collapse, but somehow he kept them going and they started to make money. Then unexpectedly, the market collapsed.

Lester was stunned. When he tried to find out what had caused it, he discovered that the two biggest lumber companies were out to undo the small sawmillers that had mushroomed after the war. They had suddenly dropped prices below costs to force the small operators out of business. Lester was stuck with millions of board feet of lumber, cut and drying, that he had to sell for less than it had cost him. He was able to pay off the bank loans but ended up with nothing.

He moved to Socorro, New Mexico, another small town about thirty miles from Magdalena, and began building houses. He had become friendly with the mayor and knew the town needed more low-cost housing, therefore, it seemed a logical thing to do. However, he hadn't bargained for the extreme anti-Semitism in Socorro. The bankers wouldn't even talk to him, and he finally

had to go out of state to El Paso, Texas, for financing. The town powers-that-be fought him at every step, but that was nothing new to him. It was another challenge and he was determined to make it work, at whatever the cost.

He started to drink every weekend, as he had in Washington. His migraine headaches were more severe than ever; the pain was there all the time, and he took massive doses of phenobarbitol, upping the dosage as the severity of the pain increased.

This caused him to increase his intake of dexedrine sulphate that he used to keep him awake enough to function. The drugs began to take their toll. Sometimes he would even get mixed up and take the wrong pill.

But it was when he began drinking *during* the week, in the evenings, that he got really frightened. Everything frightened him in those days, but he never let anyone know it. Ever since that battle won when he was nine, he'd never let anyone know when he was scared.

The whole thing finally came to a head when the town fathers sent a mentally unbalanced townsman named Jim to scare him into leaving town.

When he refused to go, Jim pulled a gun, a forty-five caliber revolver, steadied his hand on the table and said, "I'm going to let you have it."

Lester's eyes froze on Jim's finger, set to squeeze the trigger. He couldn't believe it. "This is crazy," he thought. "Can I be about to get killed? Maybe he'll miss, or just hit me in the shoulder."

Then he saw Jim's finger tighten on the trigger. He almost laughed. "This is impossible. It can't be," he thought. And at that moment, the doorbell rang.

Jim was startled; for a minute he didn't know what to do. Then he ordered Lester to answer it and to tell whoever it was that he was busy. It was the next-door neighbor, who, on the opening of the door, pushed right past Lester and went straight for the kitchen and Jim.

"What the hell do you think you're doing with that gun?" he said. And he reached across the table and took the gun out of Jim's hand.

By now, Jim was shaken up. He'd been in trouble before, and

now he'd been caught with a gun and there was a witness. They could really throw the book at him. He ran.

Lester considered pressing charges, but then figured, "What the hell, he's got a wife and two kids." He paid Jim a visit a few days later and said, "Look, I'm forgetting all about that little incident the other day!"

Jim was so relieved he could only grab Lester's hand and say, "Thank you. Thank you."

Next they sent Manuel for him. "If you don't give me six hundred dollars for the work I've done, I'm going to beat you up."

The job was only worth fifty dollars so Lester told him to go to hell.

Manuel and his friend, a big mean-looking guy, started for him. When he realized that they weren't bluffing and intended to beat him up, he held up his hand. "Wait," he said. "I'll give you the money, but I have to give you a check. I don't have any cash."

Manuel agreed and left with the check. The minute they were gone, Lester called the bank and stopped payment, then jumped in his car and raced to the bank. He wanted to see their faces when they realized what he had done. He got there just as they were coming out.

"HA! HA! HA!" he shouted right at them. He knew they wouldn't do anything to him in public, and he couldn't resist gloating.

Manuel stopped in his tracks. His fists clenched at his sides, he looked as though he would burst. "You son-of-a-bitch! I'm going to get you, you little Jew bastard! You just wait!"

"HA!" Lester said again, and added, "You're not going to do *anything* to me," and he got in his car and drove off. But on the way home, he had time to think and began to worry. After all, they had come after him once, they could do it again and the next time he might not be so lucky. He thought he'd better do something.

He drove straight to the house of a friend who had a rifle and a pistol and borrowed them. Then he went home and waited.

About nine o'clock that night, Manuel and his friend came back. Lester met them outside with the pistol.

"If I ever see you guys within sight of this house again, I'm going to kill you!" he shouted.

The taller one, Manuel's friend, said, "Oh, you're pretty big with a gun."

He answered, "Big enough to kill you right now" as he aimed it at the man's head and pretended he was about to pull the trigger. The man's knees buckled, but he kept himself from falling. The two of them got in their car and drove away without another word.

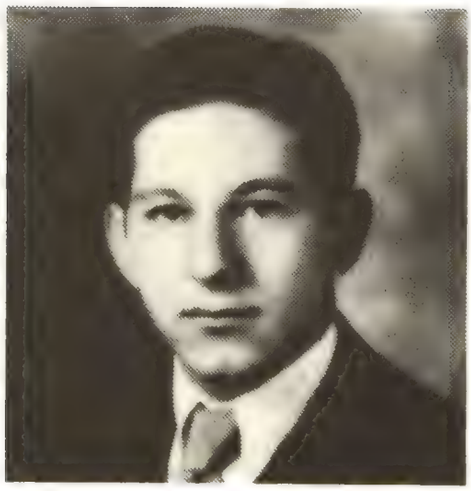
Lester went back into the house with the gun in his hand, chuckling to himself at how they'd run. But as he put the pistol under his pillow and propped the rifle near his bed, making sure both were loaded if he should need them in the night, it suddenly dawned on him what he was doing. His legs went out from under him and he dropped onto the bed, then sat there talking to himself. "What the hell are you doing, Lester? You threatened to shoot that man . . . and might have done it too if they hadn't left. Are you crazy? Have you finally gone insane? You'd better get out of here before you really do something you'll be sorry for."

He knew he had to get back home, back to where he didn't need a gun to defend himself, where he had friends, and family, and wouldn't have to be fighting for his life. He spent the night packing.

Over the next few days, he arranged with a friend to sell the remaining houses, withdrew his money from the bank, and headed back east with a great sense of relief.

*Lester in the late 1920's with his first car, a used Model T Ford which he bought for $5.*

*Lester with two of his sisters, Doris on the left and Naomi on the right, in the late 1930's.*



*Lester in 1931—age 22—*
*His graduation picture from Rutgers.*

*Lester on a bus in Germany during his European trip in the 1930's.*

*Lester (seated second from the right) and his co-workers in the Maritime Division in Washington, D.C. during the 1940's.*

*At his lumber mill in St. Raymond, Quebec, Canada, 1947.*

*Lester and his family in 1951. L to R Standing: Lester, Nat Osterman, Frank Prillo, Seated: Doris Prillo, Florence Osterman, Naomi Tucker holding Lauren Tucker.*

# Part Two
# Choosing Freedom

# Chapter 9

**Everything** worked out beautifully for once. He had kept his apartment on West 23rd Street in New York, and the friend subletting it had moved a few months before, so he was able to move right in.

He felt good being home but still couldn't relax. His busy mind never stopped. He looked around for "What next?" and very soon was busier than ever.

He still had his goal of making lots of money, feeling that if he could just hit the right thing, he'd be on easy street. While he was in New Mexico, he had bought some oil leases in Kentucky and had taken an option on a lead mining claim in Belin, New Mexico. Now he hired two miners to work the claim and arranged with a group of investors to drill for oil in Kentucky. More of the Socorro houses were sold, and he felt that now he was *really* on the way to his first million. He moved from West 23rd Street to a penthouse apartment in one of the posh hotels on Central Park South.

His social life became even more active; he was out every night to parties, the theatre, the opera, the ballet, or dinner dates. The migraine headaches were there almost daily, of course, but he managed to stagger through with the help of phenobarb to knock out the pain, dexedrine sulphate to keep him up and in action, antacids for his indigestion, entertainment for diversion, and sex for relief of tension. Oh, yes, he managed.

Then one day in January 1952, as he was getting ready for a

luncheon date, he felt a sharp pain in his chest and took an antacid. Just a little heartburn, he thought. He went to lunch, but ate lightly. That damned heartburn, he thought, chewing another antacid while his date was gone to the ladies' room. As she returned, he watched her weaving her way through the tables, and thought how unfortunate it was that he would be so busy all afternoon. She really was a beautiful girl, but eager as he was to know her better, he cut the luncheon short. He had important long-distance calls to make and said he would phone her later about meeting for dinner. He put her in a cab, then took one himself.

As he sat back for the ride home, another pain shot through his chest. It was annoying when he had so much to do. He leaned forward and sat on the edge of his seat for the rest of the way, urging the driver to hurry, coaching him as to when to change lanes, furious at the man's apparent lack of concern for his passenger's time. By the time he arrived at his hotel, he was in a sweat, shot past the doorman with hardly a glance at the man's cheery, "Good afternoon, sir," and headed for the elevator.

Midway through the lobby, another pain hit him and he had to sit on one of the chairs near the elevator, holding his chest, his back slightly arched, until it passed. The doorman was right there, "Are you all right, sir? Is there anything I can do, sir?"

Damn these people, he thought. Couldn't they tell when a person didn't want to be bothered? "No, I'm all right, just a little heartburn. I'll be all right in a minute." And he was.

When the pain stopped, he went upstairs and made a few phone calls, but somehow his mind wasn't on what he was doing. He couldn't seem to concentrate . . . and then it hit again . . . a searing, sharp pain, spreading out from the middle, moving to the left across his chest, and with a shock he realized what it reminded him of. There'd been a time, two years before, when he'd had a heart attack. Coronary thrombosis, the doctor had said. My God, he'd forgotten all about it . . . the doctor had warned him to take it easy . . . and he'd forgotten that too. He reached for the phone, but the pain . . . he dropped the phone and headed for the door . . . he had to get help right away, couldn't be bothered dialing and then waiting, waiting, waiting for someone to answer . . . they never answer right away . . . he could be dead while . . .

oh, God, there was that pain again . . . he managed to get to the intercom that connected with the doorman . . . and rang, held his finger on the button, knowing that it would be buzzing downstairs, indicating which apartment was calling, and that when he didn't answer, the doorman would figure something was wrong; after all, he'd noticed him in trouble in the lobby . . . so he held his finger on the button as long as he could before the pain became unbearable and he lost consciousness.

He came to once, in the emergency room. A young man dressed in white was standing over him, holding an oxygen mask over his face. He wanted to say something . . . fought to get free of the suffocating mask . . . finally managed to move it aside long enough to grab the young man's hand. He held it so tightly . . . he had to say something . . . his eyes pleaded with the man . . . finally, the young man understood . . . bent his head down, his ear to the stricken man's mouth . . . "You're the last person I'll ever see . . . Please . . . they have to know . . . please . . . tell them I tried . . . I tried."

Now he could go. He closed his eyes and relaxed. It was all over, he thought.

# Chapter 10

**Hours** later he regained consciousness in a private room. For a moment, he couldn't remember anything, his mind was a blank as he looked around the room. It was a hospital—that much was obvious—but what the hell was he doing in a hospital?

Then he remembered . . . the whole event replayed in his mind and he was terrified. He rang for the nurse and when she came, machine-gunned questions at her out of his panic. She tried to calm him, telling him he was in good hands, his doctor was one of the best, all he had to worry about now was getting a good rest.

The more she talked, oh so soothingly, the more frightened he became, finally demanding to see the doctor immediately.

"The doctor has gone for the day."

"Well, get him back," he shouted, "right now. I have to see the doctor now, right away, immediately, do you understand me?" He glared at her.

The nurse turned on her heel and left without another word.

"Damn," he muttered. He was scared and felt trapped. He wanted to get up and run the hell out of there and never stop until he was safe . . . until he was somewhere safe, where nothing could hurt him anymore. He wanted to run but was afraid to move. He rang the buzzer. "Damn," he muttered again. "Where is that doctor? What's taking him so long? What's that goddamn

nurse doing, anyway? Doesn't she know I'm waiting?" He rang the buzzer again.

The nurse came a few minutes later accompanied by a vaguely familiar-looking young man dressed in white, a stethoscope hanging loosely around his neck. "Is this my doctor?" he asked.

"No," she said, "your doctor couldn't be reached. This is Dr. Wilson, the resident who assisted in the emergency room."

Dr. Wilson took his pulse and listened to his heart. "You're doing fine, just fine," he said, "but it's important that you stay calm. Try not to get upset about anything. I'll just order a little something for tonight to help you rest." He wrote on the chart which hung at the foot of the bed.

"What's going to happen to me, Doc? Will I be all right?"

"What's going to happen is that the nurse will give you the medication I ordered, and you'll get a good night's sleep. Dr. Schultz will be here to see you in the morning."

Lester tried to keep the doctor there, to pin him down, to get answers to his questions, but the doctor was on emergency duty and made his escape.

The nurse gave him a hypo a few minutes later, and he felt his body start to relax almost immediately. "It's really rather nice," he thought, "to let the medicine do its work without having to be concerned about it."

As he lay there, his mind began to wander. Bits and pieces of the day passed before him, his date at lunch . . . Jimmy, the doorman, he'd have to give Jimmy an especially nice tip when he got back; after all, the guy had probably saved his life . . . coming to in the hospital emergency room, then blacking out again . . . the nurse . . . Dr. Wilson . . . wait a minute . . . coming to in the hospital emergency room . . . Dr. Wilson . . . Oh, my God, he thought, Dr. Wilson had been the recipient of his "last words." That's why the white coat had looked vaguely familiar. He felt like such a fool, remembering what he'd said. Dammit, dammit, dammit, what must the doctor think of him? Probably laughing up his sleeve at the stupidity of it. What had he said anyway? He cringed with embarrassment . . . hoped he'd never have to see Dr. Wilson again. Thank God there was another doctor to take

care of him . . . the thoughts got dimmer and dimmer as the drug took hold and he gratefully slipped into unconsciousness.

The next morning, he had a long meeting with Dr. Schultz, an elderly man with a gentle manner who told him he'd had a massive coronary thrombosis. Lester said he knew what that was; he'd had one before. The doctor asked a lot of questions; When? Where? Who was the attending physician? What medication had been prescribed? How long had he been hospitalized? Questions, questions, questions.

"Never mind that," he wanted to scream, "what about now? What's going to happen to me *now*?" But he held back. Afraid the doctor would walk out on him, he held his tongue and answered everything he could remember. "Yes, I was told to take it easy after the attack." "No, I was not able to slow down. I was in the middle of several important business deals at the time and couldn't just drop everything, now could I?"

He began to get annoyed at the doctor, going on and on about that old water under the bridge. "What about *now*?" he finally demanded. "How long am I going to be held up in the hospital? Can I have a phone installed in my room? I have some very important deals hanging fire, just waiting for me to make certain decisions so they can get rolling. There's a lot of money at stake, damn it. How long are you going to keep me tied up here in the hospital?"

Dr. Schultz didn't get the least bit ruffled. He did stop asking questions, though. Seeing that his patient was in no condition to talk, he ordered a calming medication to be given at regular intervals as well as anytime the patient appeared to need it. He wrote his orders on the chart, telling Lester what they were and the purpose of them.

"I cannot overemphasize the importance of your getting a complete rest. I don't want you to get out of bed; I don't want you making phone calls; I don't want any visitors who might get you excited. In other words, you must have complete bed rest. I'm prescribing medication for your condition, as well as something to help calm you down and keep you quiet. As far as

the future is concerned, I'd rather take one thing at a time. Let's see how you respond to the medication, then we can discuss what comes next. I'll be back to see you tomorrow. In the meantime, obey doctor's orders and just take it easy." He turned back at the door, "And try not to worry," he said, his soft voice reflecting concern and compassion for the man in the bed.

Tears sprang to Lester's eyes at the kindness, and he quickly turned his head toward the window so the doctor wouldn't see. "Okay, Doc," he managed to say, "I'll be good."

His sisters and their husbands came to see him; Doris and Frank who lived in New York City; Florence and Nat who drove over from Elizabeth; and Naomi and Lenny. It had never occurred to them that anything like this could happen to their brother, and they were frightened at his condition. He was so pale and tired, even his voice was weak; not at all like the person they remembered from their weekly get-together just last Sunday. They wanted to help, offered to do anything they could, but there was really nothing to do. So they came and went, visited him, tried to cheer him up, talked to the nurses, to the doctor, and still, there was nothing to do.

He was frustrated, too; but underlying that was a worse feeling, anxiety at not knowing what was going to happen to him and fear of the worst, not even knowing what the worst might be. Without telling anyone, he ventured out of bed on the second evening and was shocked at how weak he felt. Nevertheless, he headed for the bathroom, determined to get there on his own. He grabbed a chair for support and gritting his teeth, held on, leaning on it to take a step then dragging it forward into position for the next step. He got to the bathroom and back, but his body was bathed in sweat and shook uncontrollably. His heart was pounding wildly; he could hear it in his ears and feel it throbbing even in his fingertips. He lay in bed, expecting the pains of another heart attack to start . . . terrified that he had pushed himself too far and would now have to pay the price. But after a while, his heartbeat slowed, he gradually got quieter and became more comfortable. All the same, he was very grateful when the nurse arrived to administer his bedtime medications and silently promised himself not to disregard the doctor's advice again. He wanted to live and didn't intend to take any more chances.

At the end of two weeks, Dr. Schultz arrived for his regular morning visit, and after examining his patient, pulled up a chair and sat down.

"I'm discharging you today. Your condition is stable, and there's no reason to keep you here any longer. Now that doesn't mean you're well. Far from it. You need an indefinite period of convalescence as well as checkups at regular intervals. But you don't need to be in the hospital any longer. You can continue with bedrest and medication at home."

The doctor went on to outline his at-home program of rest, medication, and regular office visits; his diet; social activities (none); even his sex life (also none). Lester was surprised, but determined to follow doctor's orders.

"How long will this go on, Doc?" he asked. "How long do I have to take it easy like this? I realize you can't tell me exactly, but can you give me some idea?" He watched the doctor carefully as he waited for an answer. It seemed like a long time before Dr. Schultz spoke.

"How old are you, son?"

That wasn't what he expected. He wondered what was coming next. There was something in the doctor's manner he didn't like. "Forty-two," he answered and waited.

Dr. Schultz looked out the window, his face impassive as he sat lost in thought. After a long moment, during which neither man moved, the doctor nodded his head once, a sharp decisive movement which frightened Lester, and spoke abruptly and with finality.

"From now on, I'm afraid."

"What do you mean, from now on?" A very sick feeling was rising from his gut, up into his stomach.

"I mean that you cannot expect to live a normal life from here on." He went on quickly when he saw Lester's shocked look. "You've just had a very serious coronary; you're lucky to be alive at all. Anyone else would have been dead by now with the severity of this attack." The doctor paused, then cleared his throat, "I realize how difficult it must be for you to hear this, but I assure you it isn't pleasant for me either." He got up abruptly and walked to the window, his back to Lester. "I wish there were something else I could say; I wish I could tell you that in a few months you'd

be back to normal and could pick up your life where you left off," he paused, turning to face Lester quietly, "but I can't. In all conscience, I can't tell you that. And I'm sorry."

Lester was angry now. "You're sorry? Well, so am I! You saved my life . . . for what? So that I can be an invalid for the rest of it? What the hell kind of life are you giving me back anyway?"

Once started, he couldn't stop. He raved on and on. All his frustration, rage and anger poured out until the sick feeling in the pit of his stomach finally rose to his throat and he began to cough and choke. The doctor held a basin for him while he gagged and heaved and finally fell back exhausted onto the pillows, his hand shaking as he reached up to wipe his mouth.

The doctor was shaking too as he carried the soiled basin to the bathroom. He carefully placed it on the floor, then hunched over the sink, one hand on each side of it supporting his weight, his forehead touching the cold mirror of the medicine chest on the wall. In spite of all his years of practice, these situations still affected him. He thought of home and wished he were there now, his day over, relaxing before dinner with a drink or two. With a deep sigh, he pulled himself erect and walked back into the room.

"I'll sign the discharge papers today, but you can stay on if you want," he said quietly. "If you need more time to make your arrangements, I'll tell the nurse it's okay." He didn't know what else to say.

Lester answered, "No, that's all right, I'll leave today, this afternoon. There doesn't seem to be any point in prolonging it."

"All right, whatever you decide is all right. But remember that you can change your mind and stay a bit longer if you want." He stood in silence for a moment, while he closely examined Lester's ashen face. "Please be sure to take it easy when you get home. I can't overemphasize the importance of that. You shouldn't climb any stairs at all. And do you have shoes without laces; you know, loafers?"

"Loafers? No, why?"

"You might want to have someone buy you a pair. It's better if you don't have to bend over to tie your shoes. It puts an additional strain on your heart when you get into that position."

The idea struck Lester as ridiculous but all he said was "Okay, whatever you say." He'd always hated loafers but it didn't matter

now. Then as he watched the doctor walk toward the door, a question occurred to him. "Doc," he asked, "I'm not going to die, am I? I mean, I might have to kind of take it easy from here on, but I'm not going to die, right?"

Dr. Schultz stopped. "I don't know," he answered, then turned to face Lester. "I wish I could give you a positive answer, but I can't. The truth is that I simply don't know. You've had a massive heart attack and you could live for another year or two, or you could go tomorrow. I just don't know."

"Thanks for being honest with me, Doc. I'll be seeing you."

# Chapter 11

That afternoon, he went home to his penthouse as though to a tomb. "It is a tomb," he thought, "and I'm a dead man. I guess I'll just have to get used to it." His sisters wanted to help and offered to take turns staying with him, to take care of him, but he sent them away. He just wanted to be by himself.

He went to bed and mostly slept for three days, waking up only occasionally to eat, or take his medicines, or use the bathroom. Then he'd crawl, like a wounded animal, back to his hole.

On the fourth day, something changed. After his midday meal he was sitting in a chair, looking out the window at Central Park. There was snow; the trees were sparkling; the park looked like a fairyland. He was thinking of how beautiful it was and then realized that he wasn't enjoying it at all. He could not respond, even to beauty. He was a virtual invalid, with no hope of ever getting any better. At best, he could look forward to years of sitting in this apartment, nursing a frail corpse that hadn't the good sense to lie down and get it over with. That thought made him so furious he got up from his chair with the greatest surge of energy he'd had since his attack, went straight to the medicine chest in the bathroom and counted his pills. He found a good supply of the newer medications; sedatives and heart pills.

There were also morphine tablets a doctor had prescribed some years before for the pain of kidney stones. There were certainly enough left in the bottle to take him off this planet if

he chose to go. And morphine would be such a nice way to go; you just floated off on a warm, cozy cloud, everything rosy. It was certainly better than waiting for another heart attack.

Okay. Now he had a choice. For the first time since his illness, he felt he had some control over what happened to him. He considered what to do. Should he take the pills now and get it over with? No, not right now, he decided; he could always take them when and if things got too bad.

He went back to his chair and began looking the situation over, speaking aloud to himself, "You're still breathing. No matter what those doctors or anyone else says about the prognosis, you're still breathing, and that's what counts. Maybe there's some hope after all."

"Okay, where do I start?" That question brought on the sinking feeling again, and it occurred to him that perhaps he should go ahead and take the pills at once. At least then he'd be out of his misery and could stop fighting. And what had he been fighting for all his life anyway? Just a little happiness, that was all; and he hadn't found it, not ever, not in any way that lasted more than a few minutes or hours at a time. Momentary . . . that's what life was . . . momentary . . . impermanent . . . always changing . . . you'd no sooner think you had it made, had everything nailed down and could relax, than the next thing would happen and there you were again . . . right back where you'd started . . . clutching, clutching, clutching for something you couldn't hold even if you got it. What the hell was life all about anyway?

What *was* it all about? What was he doing here on this planet? It didn't make any sense to him that he should be born; go through all he had gone through in his life; never really get anywhere that really mattered; and end up with nothing, absolutely nothing except a dying body and eventually even that turns to dust. All his possessions and accomplishments felt meaningless and empty. "Like dust," he thought.

> "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust . . .
> If the war doesn't get you, the taxes must."

He had to laugh at the truth in that silly rhyme. Life seemed so stupid. But as he thought about taking the pills, he realized that he couldn't give up yet. There was something stirring in the

back of his mind . . . an elusive thought that there might be an answer if only he knew where to look. Well, he had nothing but time, he figured, and even though his body was half dead, he still had his mind; he could still think.

"Should I try?" he wondered aloud.

For a moment, he wavered, then decided with a shrug, "Oh, what the hell . . . I got nothing to lose. If it doesn't work, I can always take the pills." And he knew he would if it came to that. There was no doubt in his mind.

That being settled, he didn't have to think about it again. His mind felt clearer than it had in a long time, and for the first time since his illness, he felt truly hungry. He went to the kitchen and fixed himself a real meal. Still very weak, he took his time and didn't try to rush. As he ate, his mind was busy exploring new thoughts, questions, ideas of where to look for his answer. The new project was exciting and he felt himself coming alive again.

Refreshed and strengthened by the meal, he went back to his chair by the window. "Where to begin?" he wondered, "Well, first, what are the questions?"

"What is life? What is it all about? Is there a reason for my being here in this world, and if so, what is it?"

"What is life? What is it that I've been looking for?"

"Just a little happiness, that's all," he answered himself.

"Okay, then, what is happiness? How do you get it? Where do you find it?"

"What is life? What is this world all about and what is my relationship to it?"

"How did I get into this mess I'm in?"

"Is there a way out of this mess?" He already knew the answer to that one. Other than dying, there is no way out, but he thought if he could only get the answers, at least he'd know the reason for his life. He might make some sense out of it all, and that would be something. It would have to do.

First, he looked in the dictionary for definitions of happiness and life. They didn't tell him anything he didn't already know. Next, he went to his library of books collected over the years. There was Freud; could there be anything useful in that? No, he'd tried Freudian analysis for years, and it hadn't helped. He'd also read

every book Freud had written that had been translated into English and hadn't found the answers. No, Freud had no answers for him. He went on to others; Watson's *Behaviorism*, Jung and Adler, nothing for him in those, either.

Then there were the philosophers. He began taking books from the shelves, putting them in a pile. He'd read them all cover to cover more than once, but maybe he'd missed something. After all, he thought, he hadn't then had specific questions.

Taking books to his chair by the window, he began to read. He skimmed through one after the other, stopping to read paragraphs or pages here and there.

His head began to feel clogged with information, and his thoughts were spinning. More and more impatient, he went back to the shelves for other books, books on medicine, physics, engineering. He had books on everything and he looked through them all over the next two days. The room was a mess, books piled everywhere, some lying open on the floor where he had thrown them in his frustration. The only ones left on the shelves were a joke book and some biographies, which had been given to him as gifts.

Where to look next? "You were always a smart boy," he told himself. "Didn't you win a full scholarship to Rutgers by competitive exams when there were only three being given? Even though you were a Jew, they couldn't hold that back from you. You won it!

"And in school, weren't you always on the honor roll? And haven't you read tons of stuff on man, from engineering and physics to psychiatry and philosophy and medicine?

"Well, if you're so smart, big shot, what did all that study and knowledge and reading get you? Migraines, kidney stones, ulcers, appendicitis, pain, misery, unhappiness, and finally a coronary which should have finished you off and didn't. What more do you need before you come to your senses?

"For a smart boy, Lester, you are stupid, stupid, stupid! All that knowledge has availed you nothing. And here you are looking for more, wanting more books written by someone else who hasn't found the answers either."

"That's that!" he told himself. "I'm finished with all that crap."

With that decision, he felt a lifetime burden lift from his shoulders. Suddenly, he felt light, almost giddy. He realized he had actually been looking for the same answers all his life, but now he knew, without a doubt, that if they were to be found in any of the conventional places, he would have already found them. He would have to look somewhere else. And he thought he knew where.

He would put all that useless knowledge aside, disregard everything he'd learned, go back to the lab and start from scratch. The problems were within him, he reasoned. It was *his* body, *his* mind, *his* emotions. The answers must be within him, too. That was his lab and that's where he would look. It felt good. He went to his chair and began.

For a month he sat, relentlessly questioning, probing. At first, he tried to obey doctor's orders and spend a good part of each day resting in bed but he couldn't stick with it. His mind was too active, and this new research was the most exciting thing he had ever done. He worked at it as intensely as he had worked on other projects, by trial and experience. He had two-way conversations with himself, first posing a question, then exploring each possible answer until he could either validate it or eliminate it. By doing this, he made his first big breakthrough; got the first real answer.

It was about a month after he'd begun his self-search, and he was looking into the question of happiness. He'd already eliminated some answers and once again asked himself, "What is happiness?"

The answer that came this time was, "Happiness is when you're being loved." That seemed simple enough.

He went on. "Okay, would you say you are happy now? Do you feel happy?"

The answer was no.

"Okay," was the conclusion, "then that must mean you are not loved!"

"Well, that's not exactly true," came the rebuttal. "Your family loves you."

That made him stop and think. He saw again their concerned faces when he'd been so sick in the hospital, remembered the

pleasure in their eyes when he'd returned home after each lengthy sojourn elsewhere, heard his sister Doris' sweet voice on the telephone, "How are you, honey?" Oh, yes, he was loved. There was no mistake about that.

And there were women, too. He could think of more than one who would marry him in a minute if he asked. He knew it was so because they had asked him, and had broken off the relationship when he refused.

There were men who loved him, too, as a friend. These were men he had known all his life, real friends who had stood by him through all kinds of difficulties, who still called regularly just to say hello and see how he was doing, who enjoyed spending time with him. They loved him.

It came as a shock that with all that love, he still wasn't happy. It became obvious that being loved was not the answer to happiness. He threw it out and tried a new approach.

"Maybe happiness lies in accomplishments," he thought. He remembered when he'd won the Rutgers scholarship, when Kelvinator had upped his salary, when he got his first apartment, when he opened the first Hitching Post, when he made the coup in Canadian lumber. Proud of himself, yes. But happy? No, not what he would call happy.

"Well, then," he asked himself, "have I ever been happy, and if so, when?"

The first part was easy; of course, he'd been happy sometimes. But when, specifically? He began to look at it . . . there were the summertimes years ago when he was camping out with the fellows. He had been happy then. Oh, not every minute, of course, so what were the specific moments? The first thing that flashed into his mind was a picture of him helping his friend, Sy, put up his tent one summer. Sy had arrived late in the afternoon and one of his tent ropes had broken. Lester had helped him, both of them laughing, pleased with their friendship, feeling good about themselves and each other. He had been happy then. He chuckled at the memory. He felt good even now, thinking about it.

"What were some other times?" he asked, and the next thing he remembered was how he felt when his friend, Milton, had

eloped in college. No one was supposed to know about it, but Milton had told his best friend, Lester. He had been very happy then; was it because he felt special that Milton had told him a secret? Upon reflection he saw that it wasn't that. No, it was the expression on Milton's face, talking about his beautiful new bride and how much he loved her; they just didn't want to wait until after college. Lester had felt a twinge of envy for a moment, but then had looked closely at his friend's face beaming with love and he knew he had definitely been happy for Milton. He felt the happiness well up in him even now, after all the years, as he sat with eyes closed, reviewing the scene in his mind. Yes, he had been happy then.

As he continued to review the past, happy times came faster and faster. He remembered June and driving to pick her up for a date, his heart singing with love, impatient to see her. He had been happy then.

And there was Nettie. Oh, God, he hadn't thought about her for such a long time. He really didn't want to now, there was so much pain attached to it, but there it was. He'd been running away from that pain all his life it seemed, and he was tired, tired of running. It was the end of the line and he simply couldn't run any longer. So he forced himself to look and to question.

Oh, yes, he had been happy with Nettie. Memories flashed through his mind, moments when he had held her in his arms so tenderly, wanting to take her right inside himself. Moments at parties, when he would unexpectedly catch her eye across a room and be flooded with love. Remembering her smile, the sun glinting on her hair, the serious look on her face as they sat studying together, the faint flowery smell of her, the sound of her laughter, her voice soft in the night, "I love you, Lester."

He sat back and let the pictures flood him, wash over him, let it all flow, let the long-held pain flow. His heart ached until his carefully erected, protected dam broke and for the first time, he cried over his lost love, his Nettie, his darling. Grief seemed to come from some bottomless pit of pain and loneliness. It went on for what seemed like hours and when it was over, he felt drained and weak. When he could, he crept from the chair to his bed and slept like a dead man.

# Chapter 12

In the morning, he woke very early feeling rested and refreshed. His first thought was, "Well, then, what is happiness?" He laughed at his tenacity as he rolled out of bed and into the shower. Preparing breakfast, his thoughts continued to explore the question which dominated his mind.

Well, then, what is happiness? What is the common denominator in all these moments? There was Sy, there was Milton, then June, and his Nettie . . . what was the common denominator? Somehow he knew it was tied up with love, but he could not, at first, see how. When it finally came, it was so simple and pure and complete an answer that he wondered why he had never seen it before.

"Happiness is when *I* am loving!" He realized that in every instance, his feeling of love for the other person had been intense and that's where the happiness had come from, from his own feeling of loving.

It was so clear to him now that *being* loved was not the answer. He could see that even if people loved him, unless he felt love in return, he was not going to be happy. Their loving might make *them* happy, but it would not, *could* not, make *him* happy. It was a new and mind-boggling concept and even though he instinctively knew that it was correct, his old scientific training didn't

allow him to accept it without testing. So he looked into his past, remembering those times in his life when he had been loving and happy, and he recognized that at those times, the other person had not necessarily been loving him.

He looked at the other side too, the *unhappy* times and now that he knew what to look for, it was very obvious that he had not been loving. Oh, he'd thought at the time that he loved them, as with Nettie and June. He loved them, needed them, wanted them. But was that love, he wondered now. No, it was painful . . . he was experiencing pain that they didn't love him. And even though he called it love, he was really wanting to possess them completely, thinking he needed all their love to be happy.

That was the key! He had been experiencing a want or lack of love, expecting the other person to supply the love, waiting for the other person to make him happy. He had to laugh, it seemed so ludicrous. To think that someone else could *make* him happy seemed like the funniest thing in the world. He knew, better than anyone, that no one could ever *make* him anything. He'd always been very proud and stubborn and self-sufficient, sure that he never needed anyone or anything. "What a joke!" he thought. The truth is that he'd been all the time dying inside for want of love, thinking he had to get it *from* someone. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he laughed and laughed at the realization that what he'd been looking for all his life was inside him. He had been like the absent-minded professor looking everywhere for his glasses which were on top of his head all the time.

"What a shame," he thought, wiping away the tears. "What a shame that I never saw this before. All that time, all those years wasted . . . what a shame."

"But wait a minute!" he thought. "If happiness is when I'm experiencing love for the other one, then that means happiness is a feeling within me.

"And if I felt unloving in the past? Well, I know I can't change the past, but could I possibly correct the feeling now inside myself? Could I change the feeling to love now?" He decided to try it. He looked at his most recent unhappiness, the day he left the hospital.

"First," he asked himself, "was I experiencing a lack of love that day?"

"Yes," he answered aloud. "Nobody gave a damn about me, not the nurses, not the orderlies, not even Dr. Schultz. They did not care. As sick as I was, they threw me out, sent me home to die so they wouldn't have to watch one of their failures . . . well, the hell with them. They can all go to hell." He was shocked at the vehemence in his voice. His body trembled with rage and he felt weak. He really hated the doctor. He could feel it burning in his chest. "Oh, boy," he thought, " this sure isn't love."

"Well, can I change it?" he asked. "Is it possible to turn it into love for the doctor?"

"Hell, no," he thought, "why should I? What did he ever do to deserve any love?"

"That's not the point," he answered himself. "The point is not whether he deserves love. The point is, can you do it? Is it possible to simply change a feeling of hatred into a feeling of love—not for the benefit of the other person but for yourself?"

As the thought crossed his mind, he felt something break loose in his chest. A gentle easing, a sense of dissolving, and the burning sensation was gone. He didn't trust it at first. It seemed too easy, so he pictured again the scene with Dr. Schultz in the hospital. He was surprised to find that it brought only a mild feeling of resentment rather than the previous intense burning hatred. He wondered if he could do it again.

"Let's see," he thought, "what did I just do? . . . Oh, yes. Can I change this feeling of resentment into a feeling of love?" He chuckled as he felt the resentment dissolve in his chest. Then it was totally gone and he was happy. He thought of Dr. Schultz again, pictured him in his mind and felt happy, even loving. He saw now, reliving that last meeting, how the doctor had hated to tell him the things he had to say. He could feel the doctor's pain at having to tell a young man in the prime of his life that his life was over. "Doctor Schultz, you son-of-a-gun," he said, grinning, "I love you."

"Well, it worked on that one," he thought. "If my theory is sound, then it should work on everything." Eagerly, he began trying it

on other moments, and the results were consistently the same. Each time that he asked himself if he could change the feeling of hostility or anger or hatred to one of love, the dissolving process took place. Sometimes he had to repeat it over and over until he felt only love for the person. At times, the entire process would take only a minute or two; at other times, it might take him hours of working on a particular person or event before his feelings were only loving, but he would doggedly stay with it until it was completed on each person and each incident.

His entire life came up for review in bits and pieces. One by one, he changed to love all the old hurts and disappointments. He began to feel stronger as the weight of his pain dropped away. He was happier than he had ever been in his entire life, and he kept it going, feeling even more happiness with each new thing corrected.

He stopped going to bed because he had so much energy that he couldn't lie down. When he felt tired, he would doze in his chair and awaken an hour or so later to start in again. There was so much to be corrected in his life that he didn't want to stop until he had looked under every stone and around every corner.

Another thing that intrigued him was the question of how far he could take this. As he corrected each thing, he became happier, he could feel it; but he wondered how far he could go. Was there a limit to happiness? So far, he hadn't found any boundaries to it and the possibilities were staggering. So he kept on, around the clock.

His strength was returning, but not wanting to be distracted, he avoided getting involved in social activities and would sometimes even pass up the Sunday get-together with his family. He did his food shopping in the middle of the night, around two or three in the morning. There were very few people up and about at that hour, and he enjoyed the quiet of the city. He went on correcting his life, even while doing the necessaries. And he noticed that when someone in a store or on the street would annoy him, he was able to correct that response with love either immediately or shortly thereafter. This pleased him, and he found himself loving others with an intensity far beyond anything he

had imagined possible. As he described it many years late

> When I mixed with people, and again and again when they would do things that I didn't like and within me was a feeling of non-love, I would immediately change that attitude to one of loving them even though they were opposing me. Eventually I got to a point where, no matter how much I was being opposed, I could maintain a feeling of love for them.

# Chapter 13

He continued to correct his life with consistent results for about a month until one day he got stumped. He was working on the last time he had seen Nettie, the day she chose someone else. He had already corrected a lot of the pain with regard to her; she had come to his mind again and again, and it had not always been easy. In fact, it had been very difficult at first to work on that old relationship but gradually as he gained strength, he had been able to confront some of those long-buried feelings and correct them.

But on this particular day, no matter how hard he tried to correct it with love, there was still a feeling of despair which he could not dislodge. He wanted to escape, to get out of his chair and run, to get something to eat, to do anything that would get him away from his intense feeling. Instead, he decided to sit there until he handled it. Something told him that if he let that feeling push him around, if he lost that battle, he would have lost the war. He stayed in his chair, determined to ride it out.

He probed, "What's wrong here? Why isn't it dissolving? Nettie, oh, my Nettie." He began to cry now, tears streaming down his cheeks, all the pain he had locked up on the day they parted came now in a flood. "Why did you do it, Nettie?" he cried aloud. "Why did you do it? Why did you leave me, my darling? We could have been so happy, we'd have married and been so happy."

"Damn," he thought, "why do people do things like that? They

throw their happiness away and everyone else's, too. They have no right to do that . . . they shouldn't be allowed to do that . . . there should be some way of making them change . . . some way of changing the things they do and the effect they have on people . . ."

He felt the old pain of ulcers starting up again in his stomach and realized with certainty that the ulcers had started that last day with Nettie. He'd drunk the beer and thrown up; that had been the beginning. He wished it had been different. More than anything else in this world, he wanted to change what had happened. He wanted to go back and live it over again the other way with Nettie choosing him, with them getting married and being happy forevermore.

"Well, you can't change it, stupid," he shouted at himself, "so you might just as well stop trying to." That jolted him. He saw that he was still trying to change something that had been finished more than twenty years ago.

"No, it can't be finished," he cried. "I won't let it be finished." His throat hurt now and he felt like screaming and smashing things.

Then, like instant replay, he heard what he'd said, "I won't let it be finished." That was the source of his anguish; he'd wanted to change it all these years and so he kept it alive inside himself, the pain buried deep, eroding his happiness.

"Well, the hell with that," he said, almost flippantly. Suddenly, with that decision, the whole thing was gone. He couldn't believe it. He felt for the hurt, the pain, the despair. It was all gone. He thought of Nettie as he remembered her, so young, so beautiful, and he simply loved her. There was none of the old painful feeling left.

He began to look now in this new direction. He realized that the cause of his ulcers was that he had wanted to change everything, starting with his nearest and dearest and extending out to the rest of the world, including the United States, other countries, government heads, the weather, endings of movies he had seen, the way businesses were run, taxes, the army, the President; there was nothing he could think of that he had not wanted to change in one way or another.

What a revelation! He saw himself subject to and a victim of everything he wanted to change! He began dissolving all that. When he thought of something that caused him pain about a person or situation, he would now either correct it with love or dissolve wanting to change it.

This added a new dimension to his work, and his progress accelerated. By the time a second month had gone by, it was all he could do sometimes to stay in his chair, he became so energized. And there were times, when he had worked on particularly painful incidents in his life, that he literally could not sit and would go out into the city and walk for miles, reviewing, correcting, dissolving until he had burned off enough energy to sit still again.

Sometimes he felt as though he had hold of a chain with many links of incidents on it which needed correcting. Once he got hold of the chain, he would follow through incident by incident until there was nothing left to be corrected. An example of such a chain was jealousy.

He had always been intensely jealous but managed to hide it most of the time under a facade of not caring. Nevertheless, his insides used to burn if the girl he was with so much as looked at someone else, or even mentioned another man. Once he decided to correct this tendency in himself, he looked for it, not content to let it come willy-nilly. He would probe his memory for instances where his jealousy had driven him; correct it; then look for more. When he thought it was cleared out, he tested himself by imagining the girl he loved most making love with the man he would least want her to be with. It was a good test because he could see immediately if there was more work to do. Sometimes the intensity of his feelings would almost drive him mad, but he continued for days until there was no last vestige of jealousy left in him. When he could finally enjoy their enjoyment of each other, he knew he was finished with jealousy.

Insights came with increasing frequency. He would often gain a sudden, complete understanding of something which had always puzzled him. Philosophies he had studied became clear, and he could see that they had often started off on the right track, only to veer off into distortions, having been diverted by an

incorrect idea springing from the author's own storehouse of uncorrected feelings.

His mind began to feel like crystal . . . clear, sharp. Colors seemed brighter and everything was more sharply defined.

There was a certain greater freedom I felt. It was easier to concentrate because of it and I began to look more closely at my mind. "What is my mind?"

I asked. "What is intelligence?"

Suddenly a picture flashed of an amusement park bumper-car ride. Small round cars each have a flexible pole in the rear which connects to a wire screen spread across the ceiling. The energy to power all the cars comes from this single source, the ceiling, and is transmitted by means of the pole at the rear of each car. The amount of energy is regulated by individual drivers using a foot pedal.

To make the ride more interesting, the steering mechanism is constructed to be oversensitive. Therefore, it requires the utmost delicacy of handling to maintain control of the car because the slightest movement of the wheel sends it careening and the cars are constantly bumping into each other, out of control. And it seems that the more a driver tries to control his car, the more erratic becomes the action. This was a picture of mankind today. We all use the same single intelligence and power taken from above. But most of us are out of control, using the energy to bump into each other.

However, I began to see that I could regulate the amount of power and intelligence for my own use *and* that I could have control of it. I liked that so I began to dig at it.

I began to examine thinking, and its relationship to what was happening. And I saw that whatever was happening had a thought behind it at some time prior. And that the reason I had never before related the two was because of the element of time between the thought and the happening.

But I did discover that with everything that was happening to me I'd had a thought of it before it happened; and that, if I could grab hold of this concept and find a way to use it, I could *consciously* pre-determine everything that would happen to me!

Above all, I saw that I was responsible for everything that *had* happened to me, formerly thinking that the world was abusing me! And I saw that my tremendous effort to make money and then losing it was due only to my thinking; that I had been always seeking happiness, and thought that making money would do it. So whenever the business started to make money, and the money did not bring me the happiness I wanted, I began to lose interest and the thing collapsed. I had always blamed it on other people and circumstances, not realizing that it was simply my subconscious knowledge that this is not happiness which caused me to lose interest and that, in turn, caused the business to collapse.

This was a tremendous piece of freedom, to think that I am not a victim of this world, that it lies within my power to arrange the world the way I want it to be; that rather than be an effect of it, I can now be in control of it and arrange it the way I would like it to be. That was a tremendous realization, a tremendous feeling of freedom.

Discovering that my happiness equated to my loving, and that my thinking was the cause of things happening to me in my life gave me more and more freedom; freedom from the subconscious compulsions that I *had* to work, I *had* to make money, I *had* to have girlfriends. Freedom in the feeling that I was now able to determine my destiny, I was now able to control my world, lightened my internal burden so strongly that I felt there was no need for me to *have* to do anything.

Plus, this happiness was so great. It was a new experience for me. I was experiencing a joy that I never knew existed, never dreamed could be. So I decided, "This is so great, I'm not going to stop until I carry it all the way." I had no idea how far it could go. I had no idea how joyous a person could be. But I was determined to find out.

During the third month, things went even faster. There was a depth to his feelings that threatened to bowl him over at times. His knees sometimes buckled, but he stayed with each feeling until it was corrected.

He was becoming happier and happier, still looking to see if

there were any limits to what he could accomplish with this new process. "How much further can I go?" he would ask himself, then push it even further.

It was also during the third month that he ran into an old adversary, one he had seen out of the corner of his eye again and again throughout his life. It had lurked nearby, always on the periphery and he had never before been willing to meet it head on. It was the fear of death.

Now he recognized it as the basis of every single feeling he had ever had. He began to coax it out into the open, wanting to take a good look at this biggest foe of all, which had so very nearly won the battle only a few months ago. He began to lure those feelings into the open and to dissolve them. And it worked!

He got to the place where, with great confidence, he laughed and laughed and laughed at this foe which had kept a fire lit under him his entire life so that there had not been one moment of real peace, ever. This last of the monsters turned out to be, after all, only a feeling.

As he dissolved the fear of death, he realized one day that his body was sound, healed. The physical impairment was corrected. He couldn't explain to anyone how he knew; he just knew it as surely as he knew who he was. His body was sound.

By the end of the third month, he had slipped into a blissful, joyous state, which he could only describe as feeling like a million orgasms surging all at once through his entire body. It went on and on, and he realized that this feeling, although not sexual, was what he had always been looking for but never found in sex. He felt light, living for weeks with joy exploding inside him every moment. Everyone and everything became exquisitely beautiful to him. He kept looking for more things to correct, but there didn't seem to be much. Occasionally something would occur to him, but it would be gone almost before he could define it and the joy would surge through him even more strongly.

After several weeks, he began to wonder if there could be anything better beyond this joy. He was sitting in his chair in the usual position, slumped down, legs stretched out, chin touching his chest. He had the idle thought without expecting an answer, but the answer came.

What was beyond this incredible, joyous state that didn't stop? He saw that it was peace, imperturbability . . . and he realized with certainty that if he accepted it, if he decided to move into that peace, it would never, ever go away . . . and he went . . . slipped into it so effortlessly . . . with just a decision to have it . . . he was there.

Everything was still. He was in a quietness that he now knew had always been there but drowned out by incessant noise from his accumulated, uncorrected past. In fact, it was more than quiet; it was so far beyond anything imaginable that there were no words to describe the delectable deliciousness of the tranquility.

His earlier question about happiness was answered too. There were no limits to happiness, but when you have it all, every minute, it gets tiresome. Then this peace is just beyond . . . and all you have to do is step over the line into it.

"Is there anything beyond even this?" he wondered. But as he asked, he knew the answer.

This peace was eternal and forever, and it was the essence of every living thing. There was only one Beingness and everything was It; every person was It, but they were without awareness of the fact, blinded by the uncorrected past they hold on to.

He saw this Beingness as something like a comb. He was at the spine of the comb and all the teeth fanned out from it, each one thinking it was separate and different from all the other teeth. And that was true, but only if you looked at it from the tooth end of the comb. Once you got back to the spine or source, you could see that it wasn't true. It was all one comb. There was no real separation, except when you sat at the tooth end. It was all in one's point of view.

If that were really true, he thought, then he could tune in at any point he chose. If he were the whole comb, he could tune in with any tooth at all.

He thought of a friend in California, wondered what he was doing at that moment and was immediately there in his friend's living room. He could see the room, the people in it, his friend sitting there talking to them. He picked up the phone and called. "I just want to check something with you," he said. "You are in the living room and there are three other people there . . ." He

went on to describe in detail the room, the people and what they had just been talking about. He heard a gasp from the other end of the phone and asked if what he had described were true.

His friend answered, "Yes, but how the hell could you possibly know that?"

With a laugh Lester said, "I'm right there. Can't you see me?"

There was a long silence. He could feel panic and realized with surprise that it was his friend's panic he was feeling. He felt as though he were right inside the other man, feeling and thinking exactly as the other one. It was a totally new experience, and it suddenly came to him that he *was* the other one . . . that he was, in fact, *every* other one . . . because his essence was the essence of all. He was sitting at the spine of the universal comb. He had a new point of view and could see everything.

To ease his friend's fear, he said, "Oh, come on, you're kidding me, right? When I described those people and what everyone said, you only told me that I was right to make a joke, didn't you? It wasn't true, was it?"

He could feel the panic subside as his friend answered, "Lester, you son-of-a-gun, are you trying to tell me you made all that up?"

"Certainly I made it up. What do you think I am, some kind of a nut? It was just a joke."

"Well, you really had me going there for a while, because everything you said was true," his friend was laughing now.

"Wow, what a fantastic coincidence," Lester said. "Well, I won't keep you from your company any longer. Give me a call when you get to New York next time. We'll go to lunch together and have a good laugh over this."

"Okay, Les, be seeing you."

Lester hung up realizing that he'd have to be more careful in the future. He'd forgotten that people think in very narrow terms, unable to accept anything outside the usual.

Suddenly, he remembered himself a few short months ago. He would have thought anyone crazy who had tried to tell him something like this. How rigid he had been then, how closed his mind had been, how limited . . . and now . . . he roared with laughter at the change.

When I started my search, I was a very convinced and absolute materialist. The only thing that was real to me was that which I could see, feel and touch. My world was as solid as concrete. Then when these revelations came to me that the world was just a result of my mind, that matter had no intelligence, and that our intelligence and our thinking determined all matter and everything about it; when I saw that the solidity which I formerly had was only a thought, my nice, solid, concrete foundation began to crack. A lifetime of build-up began to tumble and my body shook and shook. I just shook for days. I shook like a nervous old person.

I knew that the concrete view I'd had of the world was never going to be again. But it didn't drop away gracefully with ease. For days, I actually shook, until I think I shook the whole thing loose.

Then my view was just the opposite of what it had been months previously—that the real and solid thing was not the physical world, was not even my mind; but it was something which was much greater; that my essence, the very Beingness of me was the reality and that it had no limits, that it was eternal, and that all those former things that I used to see as me, like my body and mind, were the least of me rather than the all of me. That the All of me was my Beingness.

# Chapter 14

It was April 1952 when he made the last tremendous breakthrough into the quiet state. "Can it be only three short months since I was dying?" he wondered. It was hard for him to believe all that had happened to him in such a short span of time. It seemed as though a million lifetimes had gone by and yet it seemed like only a moment.

His sense of time had changed radically. When he thought about it, he realized that, from where he was, in the quietness, there was no time. There was an ever-nowness. Time was relative and had meaning only in the world of differences, of separation. Where he was, everything was the same, made up of the same substance, the same inexpressibly beautiful, all-powerful peace which was inherent in every atom of the universe.

He *was* that peace . . . his body seemed small and distant sitting in its chair. He could see it there if he chose, but he felt himself spread across the entire universe; that body was only an infinitesimal speck in the vastness that he was. He was omnipresent. There was no travel, only a thought, and he was there.

> It was obvious to me that I wasn't that body and mind as I had thought I was. I just saw it—that's all. It's simple when you see it.
>
> So I let go of identifying with that body. And when I did, I saw that my Beingness was all Beingness, that Beingness

is like one grand ocean. It's not chopped up into parts called "drops of bodies." It's all one ocean.

That caused me to identify with every being, every person, and even every atom in this universe. And that's an experience so tremendous, it's indescribable. First you see that the universe is *in* you, then you see the universe *as* you. Then you know the Oneness of this universe. Then you are finished forever with separation and all the hellishness that's caused only by separation.

Then you can no longer be fooled by the apparent limitations of the world. You see them as a dream, as an apparency, because you *know* that your very own Beingness has no limits!

It was a very interesting trip. I had never known the things that I experienced existed. I had never known there was such power in the mind. But I saw how my mind could trick me so I had a maxim, "I only know that which I can *do*." When I would ask myself the question, "What can I *do*?" it was a shock every time. So I would keep experimenting until I could do whatever it was.

I kept that going and great things opened up. "If I am these things, can I do them?" I would ask. "If I am all-powerful, what power can I exert?" And powers came to me. And I proved each one to at least two witnesses. That's because I was trained as a physicist. You always have to go to the lab and do it to prove it, but it's good training.

I'll tell you the first thing I did. There was a cup on the table and when someone came into the room, I said, "I can move that cup to the other side of the table with my mind. Do you believe I can?" If they said Yes, it was instantly moved; if they said No, it remained still. I wouldn't impose on other people. If they didn't accept it, I wouldn't bother them. Of course, not having had much experience with it at first, I made mistakes. I even had people walk away from me and not talk to me. I learned to keep quiet and not disturb peoples' beliefs and convictions.

Once he had proven, beyond any doubt, that he had indeed acquired the powers he used to scoff at, he saw that they, in themselves, were a trap if he tried to hold onto and develop them for the amazement and amusement of himself and others. They

were not an end in themselves, and so he let go and moved on. Later, there were occasions when someone needed a demonstration in order to break through his or her own limitations, and, at those times, unusual things would happen. But Lester never felt like the doer of them. He was only the clear catalyst, without ego involvement.

He also realized the source of intelligence. He saw that there is only one intelligence and we all have it. Therefore, unlimited knowledge, omniscience, is available to all. And he saw it was the same with power; we all have unlimited power, omnipotence. Omniscience and omnipotence are within each one of us.

> Contemplating the source of intelligence and energy, I discovered that it too was available in unlimited amounts, and that it came simply by my freeing myself from all these former compulsions, inhibitions, entanglements, hang-ups.
>
> I didn't have to be subject to anything. Seeing this allowed the power that was right behind my mind to flow through as it had never flowed through before.
>
> I saw that I had previously dammed this energy, this power, and all I had to do was pry loose the logs of the dam—and that's what I was doing. On discovering each thing, I was removing a log and allowing this infinite flow—just like a water dam would flow if you pulled the logs out one by one. And the more logs you pull out, the greater the flow so all I needed was to remove the logs and let the infinite energy and power flow.
>
> And there were times when I'd get the realization of what I am that would put so much energy into me I would jump up from my chair. Then I would go right straight out the front door and start walking and walking and walking, for hours at a time—and sometimes for days at a time! I just felt as though my body could not contain that much energy, that I had to walk or run some of it off.
>
> I remember walking the streets of New York City in the wee hours of the morning sometimes, just walking at a very good pace, not being able to do anything else.

By the time he had finished these experiments, he had proven for himself that the source of all objective physical phenomena

was the mind; that the mind has no limits except those one mentally imposes upon oneself; and that this is true for everyone, with no exceptions. Inherently each person has the ability to have, be, or do whatever that person wills or desires.

The realization of the omniscience and omnipotence of each mind is what finally got him out of his chair. He wanted to share with others what he had discovered, wanted to help them discover it for themselves. He wanted others to know the incredibly beautiful, tremendous Being that each one is.

He went first to those who seemed to be already looking in that direction, the metaphysical groups. Looking in the newspaper, he found weekly meetings listed for the various groups in New York City and began to attend them and make friends.

> After the three-month period, I attended a metaphysical group just two short blocks away, Dr. Schaefer's group. He would call the students up to the front and ask them to give a talk. The first time he called on me, I told him I didn't want to go up, so he by-passed me.
>
> And then, after he stopped asking me, I realized it was silly. The only reason I wasn't speaking was that the old tendencies remained, but the effectiveness of them was totally gone. The compulsiveness was done away with and even though the tendency remained, it was like a burnt rope. If you try to pick up a burnt rope, it just falls apart. It looks like a rope, seems to be a rope, but it has no strength.
>
> Seeing that, I volunteered to go up and give a talk. First time in my life! Here I am, up in front of a group of about sixty people. When I got up there, I was surprised that I wasn't nervous. I was looking at them, they were looking at me. And as I was talking, I had a second thing going on in the background, "Gee!" I kept thinking. "This is easy! I never knew it was this easy!"
>
> And that was my first experience in my life of getting up in front of a group and talking.

Lester also began to read books on metaphysical subjects and was pleased to find that the things he had experienced had also been experienced by others. In fact, there was quite a body of available literature on the subject.

He often found himself the center of attention with his new friends, because they had not met anyone before with such a depth of personal experience of what they were seeking for themselves. They found him very easy to talk to and were eager to hear how he had achieved his state of personal peace. It was difficult for him to put the actual process into words but he found that in talking to people on a deeply personal level, he would find the right thing to say to help them achieve some relief from their pent-up emotional blocks.

# Chapter 15

The primary thing he talked about in those days was the inner perfection of Beingness of each one. As he talked, in his mind he would see the other person as all-perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful—a perception that gave the other one quite a lift.

However, from his long-time experience in business, when asked, Lester would occasionally offer guidance on a practical level. And, in 1953, it occurred to him that despite all his accomplishments, he still had not made a million dollars. He had also noticed that many of his new friends had the impression that only by being poor could they have the freedom they'd read about. Many of them had interpreted the tranquil state as one of lack. Admonitions such as "Let go of your attachment to things." and "Things cannot make you happy." had been misinterpreted as meaning that one had to give up ambition, money, prosperity, and abundance in order to achieve inner tranquility.

Lester knew that this was not so, that it was the *attachment* to money and things that created the nonfreedom and that this attachment was itself only a feeling. He was also very sure, based on his own experience, that all feelings could be corrected, let go of, released. So he set out to make his million, to prove both that one could have and accomplish things in the world without the deadly attachment and that spiritual freedom didn't mean deprivation. On the contrary, it meant the ability to have, to be, and to do anything and everything. But talking about it was one

thing. Actually doing it was the only way to prove it. He decided to prove his point with real estate in New York City.

In 1953, he began buying apartment buildings with no cash down. He would either run them for profit or sell them for quick profit. Within six months, he had acquired well over a million dollars equity in property.

> I started in the real estate business with no cash and bought apartment houses using mortgages and loans. With no effort, I acquired twenty-three apartment houses of twenty to forty units each. I found it was easy to do.
>
> Every deal had to be a very harmonious one. Everyone in it had to gain. If there were a broker involved, I made sure he got his full commission. The seller benefited by getting what he wanted, his building sold. And if there were a lawyer involved, he got his share. Everyone benefited in every deal.
>
> That's the way all deals should be. There's no need for anyone to suffer. Everyone should get what he wants out of it. Everyone should benefit.
>
> Every seller wants to sell. Every buyer wants to buy. I found that harmony is the basic law of the universe and when we're in tune with it, things can be done with little effort.

"What's the next step?" he wondered. He had proven he could apply his new theory to business, he had over a million dollars; what was left to prove?

Then it occurred to him that the need to accumulate wealth was not security. It could all be lost. Also, the need for accumulation indicated a lack of conviction in one's ability to produce what one needed at will. Therefore, he decided, "From here on, I have everything I need as I need it," and proceeded to test out still another theory.

> It was a few days before Christmas, cold, and I wanted a short vacation of two weeks in warm country.
>
> Los Angeles was farthest away from New York City so I said, "Well, I'm having a vacation in Los Angeles over the Christmas-New Year holidays."
>
> With full confidence that "everything is A-okay and taken care of," I packed a bag and walked out of the house. Within

a block, I bumped into a man I hadn't seen for many, many years who said, "Hey, Lester! I've been looking for you. Remember that money I owed you? I've been wanting to pay you. I didn't know what happened to you." And he handed me enough cash to buy a round-trip ticket to Los Angeles, which I did, and immediately left.

When I got to Los Angeles, it occurred to me to call an old friend who said, "Oh, I'm so happy you called, Lester, we just got a new apartment, we have an extra room and you must stay with us. Where are you?" And they picked me up.

The next morning I was in the kitchen thinking, "Well, gee, here I am in Los Angeles without a car. It's impossible to get around without one." And I said, "Well, that's taken care of," and I dropped it.

Next thought came, "Call Burl." He was an old friend I had driven with from New York to Los Angeles some years earlier. I called Burl, and he said, "I've been thinking of you, Lester. Where are you? I want to see you and I'm coming right over." And he was there in a matter of about fifteen minutes.

And we're having coffee over the kitchen table and without my asking, he puts his hand in his pocket, takes his car keys out, slides them across the table to me and says "You've got my car as long as you stay here. I have no need for it. I'm living near the studio and I walk to work." I thanked him. Now I had everything I needed.

After about ten days, I got the feeling that I wanted to go back to New York. It was about January 3rd. I called TWA and they said, "Oh, I'm sorry. We have no reservations for thirty days, all taken up. And we can't even put you on the waiting list because the waiting lists each have thirty or more people."

I just said "Thank you," hung up and said to myself, "Well, who needs a reservation? When I feel like going, I'll go!"

So, the next morning, I woke up and asked myself, "Do I want to go?"

And I said, "Yeah, I think I want to go."

I packed my bags and got down to the airport about ten o'clock, asked where the planes depart for New York, went to the gate, and a man was loading a plane for New York. I said, "Are there any no-shows?"

He said, "Yes, there is one. But wait until I load everyone. Just stand here."

While he was loading, a woman asked the same question.

He said, "I don't know, madam, but if you'll stand behind this man, we'll find out." And he put her behind me.

He loaded the plane, walked right toward me, reached around me, took this woman by the arm and put her on the plane.

As far as I was concerned, everything was 100% okay!

He came back to me and his jaw dropped! His mouth fell open when he realized what he had done. So I had to calm him down, instead of him calming me down. And after I calmed him down, I said, "Well, when's your next plane?"

He said, "In about an hour. Oh, there it is coming in right now."

Well, he put me on that plane, which got me to New York two hours earlier than the other one. It was a non-stop flight, the first one I ever had cross-country. At that time, they usually made at least one stop. Non-stop flights were new and few. This was in the days of the DC 6s and the Constellations; there were no jets at that time. It wasn't easy for them to make cross-country non-stop flights.

Then I remembered that when I'd hung up and said, "Who needs a reservation?" I'd said, "Not only that, I'll have my first non-stop flight cross-country." And that was the reason for his putting me off the first flight and putting me on the next one.

And so I got back to New York—started out with no money, and came back with no money.

Later, a trip around the world again proved the same principle of abundance: "I have everything I need as I need it."

After Lester's tremendous breakthrough into peace in 1952, that awareness of the truth never left him. Whether he was making a real estate deal, or visiting his family, or sharing his experience with others, he was always aware of and residing in his own inner Beingness of peace. People loved being with him because he saw them in the same way that he saw himself: all-beautiful, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-perfect, all-peaceful. This powerful perception projected itself to each receptive person and activated that inner core in which *each* was all those things. Many people had experiences of this truth of themselves while in his presence, and they were eager to have more and to hear of his experiences.

He was always happy to share with others and began giving talks about what he had done. At first there was no special effort or promotion in that direction, but through word of mouth people would hear of him and show up wherever he happened to be. Often, these impromptu gatherings would take place over coffee at a cafeteria on West 57th Street in New York.

Also there were occasions when he drove coast-to-coast and on stopovers along the way, he would start talking to someone, he or she would get excited and call friends who would call *their* friends. Before long there would be a hundred or more people interested in hearing him speak. At those times, Lester would stay several days, the group would rent a large hotel meeting room and by the time of his talk, there were often a thousand or more people in attendance.

He never charged any fee for his work, nor would he accept any money when people offered it. He knew he had everything he needed as he needed it, he'd proven that more than once, and his real estate ventures continued to be profitable. He had no need for anything.

In 1958, it occurred to him to move to California. He gave up his New York apartment, bought himself a new Chrysler and a 31-foot mobile home, and headed west. His original destination was San Diego but, while driving through Arizona, he saw a signpost for Sedona and his inner voice said, "Go there."

"Why?" he asked himself.

"Just go," his inner voice answered, "and you'll see."

When he drove into the quiet Old-West town set in the midst of towering red rocks, he understood why he had been drawn to Sedona. The beauty and the feeling of peace were so strong, he felt as though he were coming home.

He contacted a realtor and was shown an isolated 160-acre ranch. He bought the property for cash, no mortgage, and moved into an old stone house which the original rancher had built on the property.

It was very peaceful, totally isolated and surrounded on all sides by forestry land. The nearest neighbor was a mile away, except for a woman who owned and occupied a small cottage just inside the ranch entrance gate. They would occasionally meet when both were out walking, and one day she mentioned how lonely she got

living alone so far from town. As they talked, it occurred to Lester that she might like to trade her cottage and property for a similar house and property in town. When he proposed it to her, she was delighted and accepted his offer to find a suitable lot and build a house on it to her specifications.

He did all the work himself. He dug and poured the foundation, erected the walls, put on the roof; he did everything. It was final proof to him that his health was totally restored and that he had regained the strength, energy, and stamina of a very young man. When the house was finished, they traded. He called his new acquisition the cottage.

Now his ranch was totally isolated, and he stayed there alone for the next few years. Once or twice a month he would make the trip into town for food and supplies, but the rest of the time he was alone on the ranch. It was a very different way of life than anything he had ever experienced before, and he loved it.

His work with people, however, never completely stopped. He would occasionally drive the 110 miles to Phoenix to stay for several days or a week at a time. He also invested in some apartment houses in Phoenix during the 1960's.

After a few years, he began to make periodic trips several times a year to California where he had a regular group he worked with. And every year or so he would go to New York.

People sought him out at the ranch, too, which he had named "Self Haven." In 1961, the first person, a man named Doug Dean, came to stay for a while at the cottage. Shortly after Doug left, three women came. As the years went by, others came and went, and until 1975 there were always some people living at the cottage. A few women stayed for several years, but most people came for a few months or so to get themselves quiet and re-energized. Then they would leave to resume their lives in the world.

It was a very peaceful way of life and Lester was content. The comings and goings of himself and others were incidental and were never able to touch or disturb the vast quiet of the inner state he had discovered in himself in 1952. He could have gone on that way for the rest of his life were it not for his wish that everyone discover that state for themselves. He felt his oneness

with all and, as he described it:

> I wanted the rest of me to discover what I had discovered. So, after a while, I began thinking on how to get this knowledge out to more people.

*In Central Park, New York City, 1953.*

*In New York City at the apartment of Frank & Doris Prillo, late 1950's.*

*Hollywood Blvd. Los Angeles, California in August, 1960.*

*In New York City at the apartment of Peter Waldren, 1960's.*

*Lester (on the extreme right) at the wedding of his niece. This picture was taken on December 31, 1968 at the apartment of his sister and brother-in-law, Doris and Frank Prillo. This was the Christmas when Virginia first met him. Later, their first private meeting in 1971 took place in this same apartment.*

# Part Three
# Sharing

Lester found a way to do what he wanted, to share his discovery with others. In 1974, he devised a technique which simplifies the process he had originally used to restore himself to health and to achieve an unshakable inner peace. Thousands of people have already benefited from it and the number grows every week.

I was fortunate enough to be on hand at the time and to play a part in the development and dissemination of this process which is called the Sedona Method. It is for this reason that I'm including Part Three in this volume about Lester. It tells the rest of the story.

I also feel that the guidance I received in some of my early experiences with him will be of some interest and use to you.

# Chapter 16

It was on one of Lester's trips to Phoenix in the early 1960's that he met Peter Waldren, as described in the Preface, and that encounter eventually led to my meeting Lester during the Christmas season of 1968 at Peter's apartment in New York's Greenwich Village.

At that time, I was married, with two children, and struggling for success as an actress. Even more pressing, however, was my need to find answers to some very basic questions about myself, my relationship to the world, and my seemingly contradictory convictions about life and God and my ability to have what I wanted in the world.

Peter had invited about fifteen others, some of whom were regulars who had attended many of these meetings with Lester. Of course, Peter had told me about him but nothing had quite prepared me for the sweetness in Lester's face. His eyes were clear and soft and brown and his whole manner was very calm. As I watched him sit there quietly, without fanfare or histrionics, talking in such a warm resonant voice, I felt something inside me ease up and relax.

He talked of man's unlimitedness, of the infinite potential locked within each person. I'd never heard that before. He said we all had it, but without awareness because we had accumulated ideas which said we were limited and couldn't do things; that we believed these ideas; and as a result, became weak and fearful and stopped trying.

That last part hit home. Weak and afraid, that was me; but thank God, I hadn't yet stopped trying. I was enthralled as Lester expanded on this idea. He was striking a part of me that knew it was true and somehow had known it all along. Hearing it made me very happy.

Lester said something to me privately at that first meeting which profoundly changed my life. Our host had coffee and cake for us after the talk and as everyone was getting settled into small groups, Lester came and sat next to me. I felt very shy and didn't know what to say, so he began asking me about myself. I told him that I was married, had two children, and that we were about to move out of Manhattan to a house we were buying in Montclair, New Jersey. He mentioned that he had been born in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

As we talked, I began to feel more comfortable, and when he asked if I had any questions, I realized that I did. There was a matter of faith that had been troubling me deeply. I had always been taught that God was the creator of all things, but about six months before, in a discussion with a friend, he had made the statement that *we* create everything. That had bothered me a lot, and I couldn't get it out of my mind. I was frightened and didn't really believe anyone could answer the question.

I explained all that to Lester and then asked, "Who is the creator? Is it God as I've been taught? Or is it us, as my friend said?" My heart was pounding. I was almost afraid to hear what the answer might be.

Lester thought for a moment. Then he said, "Creation is change . . . We are the creators . . . God is changeless."

Immediately, everything clicked into place. I turned around 180 degrees, from being confused and frightened and uncertain, into total clarity. What he said answered my question completely. It made absolute sense in every way, and I started to laugh. His words kept going through my mind and every time they did, I would laugh. I couldn't help it. What I didn't realize at the time was that with each realization of that bit of truth, I was letting go of some of my programmed ideas of limitation. Lester had helped me put into action what he had been talking about in his lecture, the elimination of our incorrect limited thinking.

After that meeting, for the first time in my life I felt I had a

handle on clarity and truth. There was no doubt in my mind that what he'd said was correct. I didn't know exactly how it fit with everything else in the world, but I knew that what he had said was absolute truth. So I began to use it in my daily meditations. What I did was this:

Every night before going to bed, I had been spending a half hour to an hour in meditation. I would sit still and do certain breathing disciplines I had learned until I felt quiet. Now I added the following procedure: Once I had achieved quiet, I would use his sentence, thinking it and probing with my mind until I got a feeling of the truth of it, as I had on that first day. I didn't always laugh out loud, but there was a certain *feeling* when I connected with that sentence and it was the most wonderful feeling. Every night I would work that way until I got that feeling.

After nine or ten months, I started to feel that not only was God changeless, but also that I was part of that changelessness. Somehow I knew that there was a direct connection between me and it, and that part of me was changeless, too. At that point I wrote to Lester to share with him what his answer had meant to me, how I had been using it, and to thank him for it. I didn't expect him to answer but he did, writing a brief, warm letter validating my new perceptions and encouraging me to continue. He also gave me his phone number in Phoenix and invited me to call him, which I did a week or so later. The conversation allowed me to elaborate on my experiences, to ask questions, and to receive further guidance. I hung up feeling very high, almost giddy, and with even more determination to continue this new direction.

I phoned him again to wish him a Happy New Year, 1970. After that, even though he had said I could call anytime, I didn't want to take any chances of wearing out my welcome. It was enough just to know he was there if I needed to call.

Much happened in my life the next year. My older son was having growing-up problems; my husband was working long hours and we didn't see very much of each other; my father's health was failing. We had all known for some time that he had emphysema but he always managed to keep going. Now my mother told me he was slowing down more each week so I persuaded them to sell their house in Pennsylvania and move in with us. After all,

I argued, we had a thirteen-room house; there was plenty of room for everyone. In fact, when we were buying that house, my husband and I had discussed this very possibility and had been pleased to find such a large and beautiful place.

In August my husband's company unexpectedly closed its New York office and he was out of work for several weeks until he began doing free-lance work. This meant a fluctuating income, so I went back to work in September, choosing flexible hours that allowed me lots of time with my younger son, Eric, who was only five.

I was unexpectedly happy to be working. Meeting new people and being physically active were invigorating. I continued my nightly meditations and began to feel a tremendous joy in everything I was doing. I knew it was connected somehow with the conversations I'd had with Lester because his words would often come to my mind. I wasn't sure exactly how that connection worked, I just knew that I experienced a lovingness toward people in a way that I had never felt before. Sometimes I felt like the sun, as though something inside me shone out onto everybody. It was a glorious, exquisite feeling. I wrote to share it with Lester and very quickly got back another letter of encouragement.

This was a very beautiful period of my life, but brief, only about two months. Then the pressures of money, my father's illness, and the increasing feeling that my husband and I had gone in different directions began to weigh heavily on me. Consequently, on New Year's Day of 1971, when my husband came into the kitchen as I was cooking dinner and said, "Oh, by the way, I ran into Peter yesterday. Lester's in town," I immediately picked up the phone and called Peter. Within minutes I had Lester's New York number and was talking to him. After exchanging Happy New Year's, I asked if I could meet with him, and we arranged an appointment for the following Tuesday, January 5, 1971. That date has great significance to me. It was my first private meeting with Lester and was the real beginning of our association.

# Chapter 17

As I drove to New York that night, I was trying to sort out in my mind what I would talk about to Lester. There seemed to be so much to deal with at the time. I thought maybe I could share my feelings about my marriage. I didn't know what anyone could say that would help with that problem, and I wasn't even sure I could bring myself to talk about it, but I felt good about seeing Lester. I knew it would help somehow.

Lester was staying with his sister and her husband in New York, near Columbia University, and we met at their apartment. It was on the twentieth floor and to put me at ease, the first thing he did was show me the view. It was beautiful: the George Washington Bridge, Grant's Tomb, the Hudson River, the New Jersey Palisades Amusement Park with all the lights.

Then he invited me to sit in one of the two easy chairs in the living room. He took the other one, facing me from across the room.

"I don't know how to begin," I said, feeling very shy and uncertain, now that the moment was here.

"Oh," he said, "just start at the beginning."

"But I'm not even sure where the beginning is," I said. "I think I should apologize to you because what I want to talk about is not very profound."

He gave a little wave with his hand. "That's all right," he said. "Just say whatever you want to say."

I could feel tears welling up in my eyes. I swallowed. "It's about everything, my whole life. It's such a mess."

"Take your time," he said. "Just relax and take your time. You don't have to rush."

"Okay," I said. He was so peaceful, it helped to ease some of the pressure in me and I sighed deeply. "Well," I began, "there's my husband, David. We don't seem to communicate very much any more . . ."

Once started, I couldn't stop. One thing led to another and I went on and on. There hadn't been anyone I could confide in for a long time. My close friends were in New York and between my living in Jersey and working all the time, we never seemed to get together. There was my mother, of course, but she had her own problems, and I didn't want to burden her. So now, with Lester's kindness and peaceful presence, all my fears and worries tumbled out. And did I cry . . . so much so that at one point, he had to get me a box of tissues from another room. I'd never realized how much grief I'd been bottling up inside.

Finally, I looked up at Lester. He was sitting there quietly, watching me. "I'm sorry," I said. "I just can't help it. It's so difficult and there are so many angles to everything, my head gets terribly jammed up. I don't know where to go next, I don't know what else to say."

"What do you want?" he asked quietly.

I looked at him again. What did I want? "Well," I said, "what I want is to find some kind of solution to everything. I want a magic formula, Lester. I want somebody to wave a magic wand and say it's all okay and it's going to be okay. I don't want to have to talk about it, I don't want to have to do anything. I just want it to be okay." I laughed. "Can you manage that for me?"

He laughed, too, lifted his hand and waved it in my direction. "There," he said, "everything's okay."

That took me by surprise and I really laughed this time, a deep belly laugh. Then we sat smiling, not speaking. I felt better. I knew his silly gesture hadn't really fixed anything, but it had made me

laugh. I knew too, that no one else could solve my problems but I suppose I was always hoping someone would come along like the Lone Ranger, and one-two-three, everything would be fixed. Nevertheless, I could see that I'd have to do it myself.

"Okay," I said after a few minutes. "What can I do to help my son Richard? He's a teenager and is going through a lot of pain, trying to grow up. And I feel like I've been a rotten mother. I guess that's the worst feeling of all, the feeling that somehow I ruined everything for him, that I should have been different. And I don't know how to fix it. I've tried, every way I know how, and I couldn't fix it."

"Well, maybe it's something that Richard has to fix for himself," said Lester.

I thought about that for a minute. That had never occurred to me, that it was something Richard had to fix. It always seemed as though it were my doing and my problem, and that I had to fix it. "That's a new idea," I said to Lester. "That's a very new idea. I never thought of it that way before. How can he do that?"

"Well," said Lester, "did you ever fix anything for yourself?"

"Yes," I said, "I guess I did. But what could Richard do? I mean what could I suggest to him?"

"See?" said Lester. "There you go. You're still trying to fix it for him, aren't you? You're not letting him find his own way."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you just said you're trying to think of something you can tell him to do to fix it, didn't you?"

"You're right, I am still trying to fix it for him, aren't I?"

"I think you are. Why don't you let him figure things out for himself? He might think of things just right for him that you would never dream of."

"He might at that; he's very bright." I felt a little better at the thought that Richard really could fix it for himself. It took some of the burden from me. "But wait a minute, Lester," I said. "It still seems to me that I need to do something more. I don't know what, but I still feel like it's my fault. That's what the problem really is. I feel as though he wouldn't have anything to fix if I had been a better mother, if I hadn't been interested in theatre, if I'd stayed home all the time."

"Well, think about it," said Lester. "You loved him, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, I did, Lester. I still do. That's what breaks my heart. I love him so much, it hurts me to see him hurting." I was starting to cry again. Lester waited until I stopped.

"Well, you being his mother, and loving him, you did the best you could, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then why should you feel guilty about it? You didn't do the wrong things on purpose, did you?"

I had to laugh. It was such a ridiculous thought, that I would do things wrong on purpose. And I realized that I hadn't. I looked at Lester. "I really did have good intentions," I said.

"Right," he said, "you did."

"Well, then, I don't really have to feel so guilty."

"No, probably not," he said. "It's up to you."

"You mean it's up to me whether I feel guilty or not?"

"Sure," he said. "Whose feeling is it?"

"Mine," I said.

"Right," he said. "So if it's your feeling, it's up to you whether you have it or not."

That made me laugh again. "I never thought of it that way," I said.

"Most people don't," he said.

I was feeling much better. Then I thought of my parents and my father's illness. I mentioned it and Lester said, "Well, is there anything you can do about it?"

"I can keep my sanity," I answered. "That might help."

He laughed. "Yes, I think that would help quite a bit. Is there anything else you could do?" he asked.

"Well, yes," I said. "I think I could be kinder."

"What do you mean, kinder?"

"Well, one of the things that's been happening is that I've been so upset with everything that I've been very crabby. I've been snapping at my father and my mother and Richard and Eric and David. They don't know what's the matter with me. I don't even know what's the matter with me half the time. I think that's the worst thing, Lester; I haven't been kind. I've turned into a mean person. That's the worst thing."

My throat was so tight, I couldn't talk for a minute.

"What are you thinking?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know, Lester. I was just thinking that I need to be a better person. I don't know. My head feels sort of blank."

"Does that feel bad?" he said.

"No. Come to think of it, it doesn't feel bad. It feels a lot better than when I came. On the way here, my head was spinning, and I had a little headache. That's gone now. I still don't know what to do, but I feel a little better about it, anyway."

"What do you think your obligations are in this situation?" he asked.

I thought of my mother and father, what was my obligation there? "With my mother and father," I said, "I guess if I can just be kinder to them, that would be a good start."

"Yes," he said. "I would agree with that."

"About Richard," I went on, "I guess what you said about him finding his own way out of it—I mean, I've done everything that I could. I've done everything that I knew to do, and none of it helped, none of it worked. So in the long run, it really is up to him, isn't it? I like to think of him as a child but he's a young man now. Maybe my obligation to him would be just to be there, to let him know that I'm there for him to talk to if he wants that. I've tried in the past to sit down and discuss his problems but that didn't work too well. Maybe if I just let him know that anytime he wants to talk about things, I'm there, then I don't have to worry about it so much. I think that would help him."

"Yes," Lester agreed. "We can't do things for the other one; we can just be there to support them in their doing for themselves. Maybe part of the problem is that you tried to do too much for Richard. What do you think?"

"Yeah, I guess I did," I answered. "I guess I thought I could do the whole thing for him, but I couldn't. You really can't do it for another person. You just do the best you can. I probably tried too hard to solve everything and that just made it worse most of the time. For Richard, I can just let him know that I'm there."

"What about Eric, the little one?" Lester asked.

I thought about my Eric, so sweet, so beautiful a child. Richard had been like that, too; sweet, with an inner kindness. "I think with Eric, I'll do better. I guess the best thing I can do for him is

to learn from the mistakes I made with Richard. Instead of jumping in and trying to be the referee between him and life, maybe it would make more sense to just help him work things out for himself. I think that would help."

"I think so, too," said Lester.

"I really feel better," I said, with some surprise. "My head feels much clearer. I'm very grateful to you, Lester. I can't imagine another person in the world that I could have talked to the way I've talked to you tonight. Thank you."

"You're welcome," he said. "Anytime."

"I don't want to impose."

"You won't be imposing. I want to do it."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because that's the only thing that has any meaning for me."

"What is?"

"Helping people," he said.

"Does everyone come to you with problems like mine?"

"Everyone has problems," he said. "And they talk about what's bothering them. I try to help with whatever it is." He must have sensed my unspoken question because he added, "It's all right," emphasizing the words. "You can talk to me about anything. It's all right." And suddenly I felt that it *was* all right. A vague, troubled feeling I'd had disappeared as he repeated those words.

"It's getting late," I said. "I'd better go."

"I'll take you to your car," he said as he helped me on with my coat.

"Oh, no, there's no need. I'll be perfectly safe."

"No," he said, "I'd like to."

On the way out, we talked about the weather; it was a lovely crisp winter evening. When we got to the car, I asked, " May I call you again? May I see you again?"

"Yes," he said, "I told you, anytime."

"What about next Tuesday?" I grinned. "That's my next day off."

"Fine," he said, "and you can call me in between, too, if you want. We can speak on the phone."

"Thank you," I said. "Thank you so much."

"You're welcome."

"Well, good night," I said. I opened the car door and got in, and he waited until I drove off.

All the way home I thought about the meeting and about the decisions I'd made, being kinder, letting my family know that I was there for them. I was very relieved and happy to feel there was a way to resolve my problems.

Lester stayed in New York until the end of February and was there for me when my father died. I don't know how I could have survived that loss without his support. Three days before the end, I was at a meeting with Lester. Barely half an hour after my arrival, the phone rang. My father had been in the hospital since the beginning of February, and my mother was calling me.

"Virginia, the hospital just phoned. Your dad's worse and they're taking him back to the intensive care unit. Please come home for me; we have to get there right away."

"Okay." I said, "I'll leave right now."

I was calm for my mother but the minute I hung up, I started to cry. My best friend had committed suicide when I was nineteen. A very dear cousin had burned to death in a car crash when I was in my twenties. Two years later my grandmother died . . . now my father . . . This was the breaking point. I felt that if he died, I would die, too. I couldn't take any more; I couldn't. As I sat there on the kitchen chair, sobbing out of control, I tried to express my dilemma to Lester.

"I don't even know what to pray for . . . if I only knew what to pray for. If I pray for him to live, that's selfish because he's suffered so much already. If I pray for him to die, how can I live with myself? . . . I don't know what to do anymore. I can't stand it."

Lester was very quiet through all this and when I calmed down enough to hear him, he said, "It's easy. Just want for him what he wants for himself."

I heard him, really heard him, and at that moment saw how simple it was. My grief was gone in an instant. It was so simple . . . just want for him what he wants for himself.

"What do you want, Daddy?" I thought. "If you want to stay, I'll love you and take care of you. If you want to go, I'll love you and hold you in my heart forever. I love you. Nothing, not even death, can change that."

Three days later, he died. At a quarter to three on the morning of February 13th, the day before Valentine's Day, he decided to go, quietly, in his sleep.

My continuing conversations with Lester helped to ease the heaviness of my father's dying and made it possible for me to accept it. They also enabled me to help and support my mother through this most difficult period of her life.

# Chapter 18

**Before** he went back to Arizona, Lester invited me to spend the summer at his ranch. At the time, I had no way of knowing the impact it would have on my life or even whether I could make it or not, but I really wanted to go. My relationship with him had changed my life enormously already. For the first time, I knew somebody was there with the answers if I needed them. And I know now that I was changing as a person. Before, many times I'd thought I was happy, even when I was miserable. It was the oddest thing. I was optimistic, I suppose, always living on a dream that something wonderful was going to happen. It's like thinking that someday you're going to be rich and famous and have the world at your feet. You can live in your fantasy of how it's going to be and ignore the way it is, and you think you're happy. And you never give up hope. That's the way it was for me.

After I met Lester, it wasn't that I gave up hope, but I began to realize that the fantasy was just that—pie in the sky. I wasn't doing anything to make it come true. I was just drifting and hoping. It was because of that realization that I began to pay attention to what was happening each day, and that was a big change. I don't remember any great dramatic shift, but it seems that I began to live more for the moment at hand. And I became aware that if I was to be happy, it should be today, every day, not in some make-believe future.

As I struggled with my life as it was for the first time, working two jobs, reevaluating my marriage, and recovering from my father's death, the idea of going to the ranch became more and more attractive. I knew I needed that time for myself, and I started saving some money for the airfare and expenses. By the time summer came, David and my mother could both see that I needed to get away. I was very thankful. It was the first time I'd ever taken a vacation just for myself, really the first time I'd ever been alone. I'd always been afraid before. But now I felt ready; I could handle it.

Lester picked me up at the airport and as we drove north to the ranch, he offered me a choice of places to stay. One of the women who was living in the cottage had gone for the summer, and I could either use her room or I could stay alone in an old trailer on the property, midway between Lester's ranch house and the cottage. After some discussion, I chose the trailer.

We arrived at the ranch in late afternoon. As we drove through the gate, Lester pointed out the cottage, which was visible from the road. We didn't stop, though, but went directly to the trailer, an old twenty-foot silver one which a previous visitor had brought and left. Lester helped me inside with my bags, then left me to settle in, reminding me that the women had invited us both to dinner at seven.

"Good," I said. I was eager to meet these young women who had left worldly pursuits behind and dedicated their lives to obtaining happiness as Lester defined it.

> Happiness is our inherent, natural state. The best definition for happiness is peace, tranquility, and serenity. Happiness is the absence of apathy, grief, fear, jealousy, anger and hate. Happiness is loving. Happiness is freedom; absence of limitations. The less limited we are, the freer we are—and the happier we are.

After he left, I looked around the trailer, home for the next six weeks. A single bed, small table, one straight chair, a refrigerator, a sink, a hot plate, and two five-gallon containers filled with water, which had been brought from town, since there was no running water. It was very different from my thirteen-room house in New

Jersey and I loved it. I was on my own for the first time in my life and, as I unpacked and put my things away in the small chest of drawers, I felt safe and comfortable and relaxed.

Lester picked me up at seven and we drove to the cottage. Our hostesses came outside when they heard us drive up and Lester introduced us under the stars. Then we went inside and had dinner. They were very warm and friendly, making me feel at home. I wasn't too talkative, but they didn't seem to mind and I appreciated that. I thought they liked me. I knew I liked them very much.

During my stay, the days went by in an easy rhythm. Get up very early . . . have tea and a light breakfast . . . look out the window at the beautiful vista of gigantic red rocks, all different shapes and shadings of red, looking like a child's giant sandbox abandoned helter skelter when his mother called him to lunch . . . think . . . contemplate . . . take a walk while small, timid, desert lizards scurry away . . . lunch . . . late-afternoon walks to the women's cottage for a shower and a few minutes' companionship . . . back to the trailer for dinner . . . and then at eight o'clock to Lester to discuss my day's progress toward freedom and happiness, the goal of everyone who came to that place.

During my meetings with Lester, there were often moments of silence that stretched into half an hour or even longer. When it would get very still, Lester's cat, Shanti, sensed it. He would come like a soft grey cloud of smoke, from wherever he was and sit in front of Lester's chair. His head would nod, then he would sit motionless for as long as we sat, Lester, the cat, and I on the couch by the door, all equally motionless. Sometimes after a while, Lester would resume our conversation. Sometimes he would offer me a cup of tea or an apple. Other times, not wanting to disturb the stillness, I would just get up without a word and go back to the trailer. Oh, how beautiful that silence was!

We ate very simply at the ranch. The others cooked real meals but I never did, and neither did Lester, except for an occasional egg. He ate cheese, bread, tea, and I did, too. Sometimes I would grill cheese. It was a very simple life. Simple, beautiful, quiet, serene, far away from the turmoil of the cities. I could understand why he had called it "Self Haven."

I would often go for walks along the road. It was very isolated, and you rarely saw anyone except the people who lived at the ranch, although sometimes cowboys would come through looking for stray cows. You'd hear them shouting to each other, "You go that way; I'll look over here."

Or you'd hear them talking quietly to each other as they clip-clopped along on their horses. They were not the Hollywood variety . . . but real cowboys with dusty ten-gallon hats and worn boots.

Sometimes you'd see cattle . . . or deer. The road leading to the cottage was carved out of rocky terrain, and there was a hill on the left and a drop-away on the right. Sometimes deer would come down the hill and leap across the road onto the rocky slope. I never could imagine how they kept their footing. They were so graceful and so beautiful. Once, while walking to the cottage, I saw a deer standing still, looking at me. It was a doe, sweet and gentle, just looking, just watching. I stopped and looked back at her. We stood there silently for a few minutes, then she turned and went her way. She had her baby with her, a little fawn, and they galloped away together. It reminded me of my darling Eric and when I got back to the trailer, I wrote him a postcard telling him about the deer and her fawn.

There were lizards, too, little desert lizards. Very timid, they would scurry away if you came anywhere near them. Yet they were friendly. Sometimes you could catch them and pet them and they loved it. Sometimes they would chase each other. They have a defense mechanism whereby, if they're being chased and get caught by the tail, they'll drop their tail. Then, of course, they grow another one. It takes months, but they do grow another tail. I didn't know that, and the first time I saw one lose its tail, I was shocked. I said, "My goodness, one lizard just bit off the other one's tail." Then Lester explained it to me.

There were beautiful insects, too. Some of the beetles had the most incredible colors. Vivid, vivid opalescent greens and bright reds. They were little tiny insects, but with the most exquisite colors. And there were butterflies, enormous, beautiful butterflies.

The vegetation included pine trees, cedar trees, and I think there were cypress, too. And huge manzanita bushes. There were

century plants and cactus. The most prevalent cactus was the prickly pear. It bloomed with huge, bright red or yellow flowers. They were gorgeous in bloom.

Many things happened within me in a quiet way that summer, mostly new perceptions, ideas, insights. Much of my life came up for review, and I saw many things in a new and clearer light. I kept a careful notebook. I knew it would serve me well when I had to return to that other world, the one in New Jersey.

And the time went by so quickly. Before I knew it, it was almost time to go back and there was still one thing I hadn't settled in my mind. It was my marriage, and I needed to talk it over. So a week before I was to leave, I went over to see Lester late one afternoon. He was sitting in his usual place, a large brown recliner chair.

"How's it going?" he asked.

"Fine," I said. It often happened that I would go to see him filled with turmoil, and start to unwind and get answers even before I spoke. We sat quietly for a few minutes. Then Lester said, "Would you like some tea?"

"Yes, please."

He put the water on to heat and we stepped outside, enjoying the beauty until the whistle of the kettle brought us back inside. He made tea, and we sat down again.

"I wanted to talk to you about my marriage," I said, "but I think I already know the answer. David is a good man and I would very much like to make it work. Nevertheless, we can't really talk to each other anymore and it wouldn't be right for me to stay with him if it was only because I needed a sense of security, would it?"

"No, that would only make you both unhappy."

"That's what I thought." My head felt clearer. I still didn't know what my final decision would be, but I did know that when I got back to New Jersey, I'd be much better able to evaluate things, and that whatever decision I made would be okay.

When it was time to leave the ranch, part of me wanted to stay.

I had developed a genuine feeling of belonging, although I knew that that life couldn't be my life. My family, my obligations, my ambitions created for me another very different path. I had to seek my happiness through more worldly avenues and see if I could apply all that I'd learned here, out there in the world; see if real happiness, as Lester defined it, could be mine wherever I was, whomever I was with, or whatever I was doing.

# Chapter 19

When I got back home, I did try. I tried talking to David, but each time, realized anew that we had grown too far apart and real communication seemed impossible. Finally, in October, we separated—a great trauma for everyone. I spent time on the phone with Lester, talking things over, working out how to best handle the family's upset and how to deal with my own. He was a sane voice without any personal stake in the problem, purely objective and with a tremendous depth of understanding. He continued to be a friend I could count on.

He helped me with other problems, too. Whatever bothered me, I knew that when I called him, he would suggest something that would help.

"Lester, I don't know what I'm going to do. The girl I work with is impossible. No matter how many times I ask her not to do certain things, she keeps right on doing them."

"Look, the problem is that she's doing things you don't want her to do, right?"

"Right."

"Well, could you just *want* her to do what she wants to do?"

"Why should I? She's in the wrong."

"Yes, but you're the one who's unhappy."

"But she should stop doing it. It's not fair for her to keep on that way."

"What can you do about it? Do you think you can stop her?"

"No, that's the trouble . . . no matter what I do or say, she just

keeps right on doing whatever she pleases."

"Well, maybe if you *wanted* her to do what she's doing, you'd feel better. What do you think?"

"Well, I never thought of it that way but I suppose if I *wanted* that, then when she did it, it wouldn't bother me."

"Right. So do you think you could do that?"

"I think I could try."

It was amazing how effective that little bit of advice was. Every time she would do something that bothered me, I would get furious for a minute until I remembered what Lester had said. Then I would think to myself, "Can I *want* her to do what she wants? Can I *want* her to be happy?" And when my answer was yes, the angry feeling would disappear.

But the best thing was the feeling which replaced it; I found myself actually beginning to experience joy over her doing those dumb things. In fact, I came to think of her as rather cute, like a child.

These contacts with Lester kept me going until the summer of 1972, when he invited me back to the ranch.

I was there for two months that summer. I stayed in the trailer again, and it felt like coming home. The days were spent as they had been the year before, the high points being my daily walk to the cottage for a shower and, of course, my daily meeting with Lester.

One day, he looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes. "Have you ever wondered why I allow the women to live here?"

The question surprised me. "Well, I have thought of it," I said, "but I assumed that it was because you wanted to help them."

"Yes," he said, "that's true. But that's only part of it." Teasingly, he said, "Would you like to know what the other part is?"

"Sure," I said.

"It's because I want them to get to the place where they're free enough to help others the way I've helped them."

"That's great," I said. "What do they think of it?"

"They like it. None of them is ready yet, though."

"Maybe I can help you someday," I said.

He laughed at that. "No, you're too far down the line," he said.

After all that's happened since, I have to laugh, too, when I think back on it. But it wasn't funny to me that day. He'd gotten my goat. "What do you mean, I'm too far down the line?"

"You have too far to go before you'd be able to help anyone else."

That really made me angry, and for the first time, I snapped at Lester, "I don't think you should make such a judgment," I said. "You don't know what I'm capable of. You really don't."

"I have a pretty good idea."

"Well, I'm not so sure," I said. "You might have an idea, but you don't *know* what I'm capable of. And just because the others have been here for a while doesn't necessarily mean they can do something nobody else can do."

He laughed, and that made me even madder. "I don't think it's funny," I said.

"No," he said, "it's not funny. It's just that I never saw you angry before. It's good. It shows progress. If I'd said that to you last year, you would have cried."

I had to laugh as I realized he was absolutely correct. "Yes," I said, "you're right."

"Now, what I'm talking about," he said, "is that to help others requires dedication, and these women have indicated they have it by coming out here to apply themselves. They've let go of trying to find their happiness in the world. You haven't done that yet. And," he added, "I'm not sure that you really want to."

That stopped me. I wasn't sure I really wanted to, either. There were still so many things I had to accomplish in the world. I looked at him. "So in order to do that, does that mean I have to give up everything?" I asked.

"Oh no," he laughed, "you don't give up a thing."

"But you just said that the others gave up the world. They gave up everything."

"No," he said. "They didn't give up anything. I said they let go of trying to find their happiness in the world. But you don't give up anything. The way to have *everything*, including everything in the world, is to become free of your limitations. When you're free, you can have, be, or do anything you will or desire. And it's easy. If you're not free, many things are difficult to accomplish. When you're free, you can have everything with little effort, so you don't give up anything. You gain more and more happiness, joy, and serenity. Why don't you go back to the trailer now and think about what I've said?"

I didn't want to go. I wanted to stay and talk about it, but he was firm.

"No," he said. "It's better that you go and give it some thought.

I've started you in a direction. If you go off by yourself, you may come up with some new insights. Talking about it will only be a distraction right now."

"Okay," I agreed.

I left and walked back to the trailer, his words ringing in my mind. "You don't give up anything. You can have it all with ease." It occurred to me that after all, he lived very simply out here on the ranch. If he could have everything, why didn't he have it?

The next day when I approached him with the question, his answer was simple. "When you can have anything and everything," he said, "you find that you need very little. You don't have to be always chasing for things to make you happy. You don't have to chase after your happiness. You can be happy with a mansion, or with a stone ranch house. You can be happy with caviar and filet mignon, or with eggs and cheese. You can be happy with the love of your life, or you can be happy sitting alone. When you're free, you stop looking for happiness where it is not, and begin finding it where it is."

"And where is that?" I asked. "Where is it?"

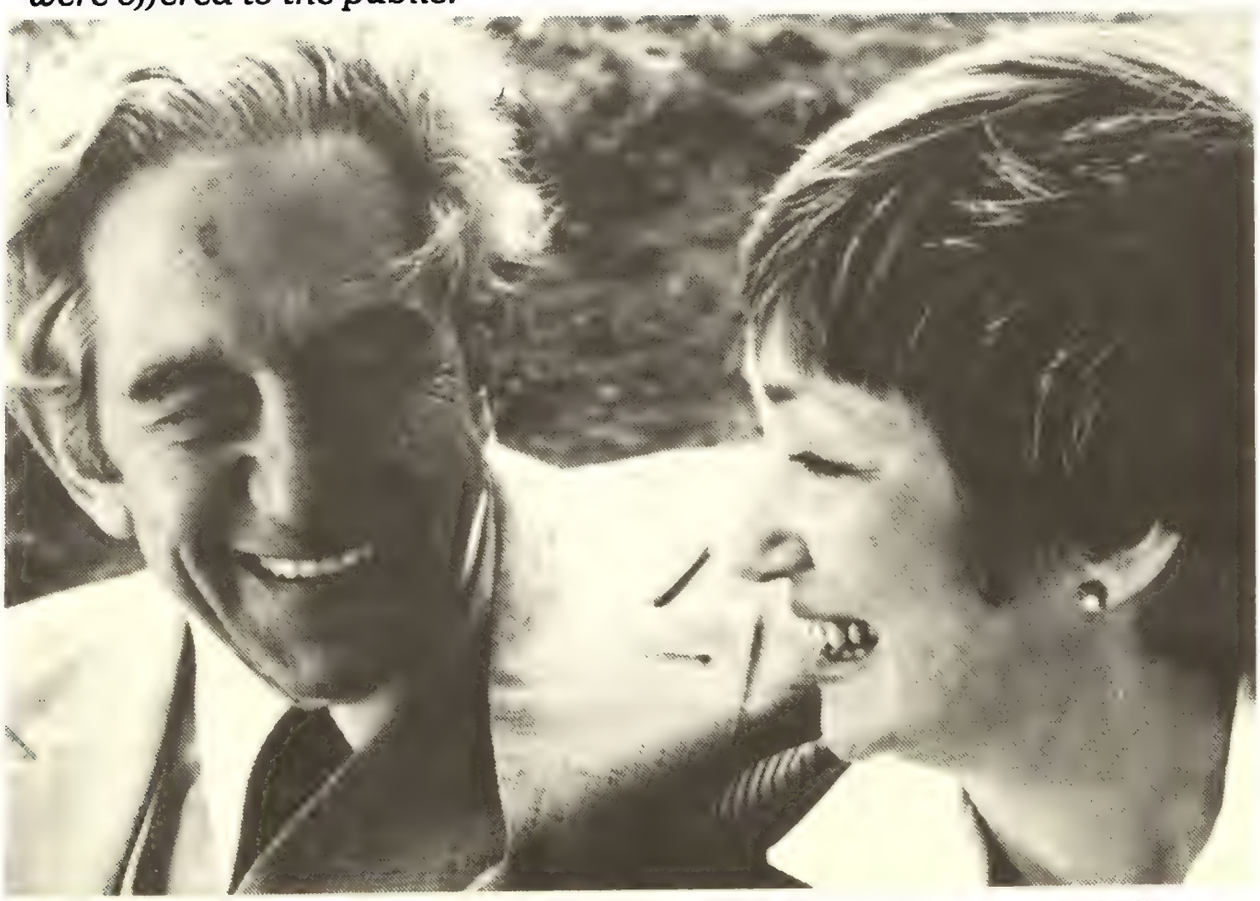
He smiled. "It is within you."

His answer hit something so deep, it took my breath away. I left without another word, went back to the trailer and spent the rest of the day with that thought. "It is within me." "It is within me." "It is within me." "It is all contained within me." Suddenly my perspective shifted on the things I had been struggling with all my life—theatre, relationships, friends, family—and for the first time, it all began to make sense. I had never found happiness in those things. I might be happy or unhappy with the same relationship. I might be happy getting a part in a play and the next minute be unhappy that it wasn't a better part. I began to see that it wasn't the thing that made me happy. This was a new perspective I was just beginning to glimpse, and I had a feeling that when I got it fully, when I saw it completely, it would, it could, set me free.

*Virginia at the ranch, 1972.*

*The trailer where Virginia stayed.*

*Lester built this building in Sedona in 1974 and it's where the first classes were offered to the public.*



*Lester and Virginia in New York's Central Park, Autumn of 1979.*

*Lester in Sedona with Peter Waldren and Peter's friend, Reggie Israel, Christmas, 1981.*

*Lester and Virginia at her house in Sedona, Thanksgiving Day, 1983.*

# Chapter 20

I went back to New Jersey with that thought. And with the growing desire to somehow help Lester with his work as he was planning for the others to do, even though I had no idea how that could possibly come about.

I thought that perhaps I could do it within the framework of theatre. Theatre might be the way I could spread or share with others what I had gotten from him. I felt that things weren't happening coincidentally. It seemed that everything was leading toward some kind of involvement for me in his work. I had no idea then that I would ever give up acting. That was the furthest thing from my mind.

And then, one day as I was thinking about my acting career, it occurred to me that here I had been, for years and years, trying very hard to be a successful actress. That was on one side.

On the other side was my conviction, which I'd had all my life, that if I wanted something badly enough I would get it; and I said, "Wait a minute. Something doesn't jibe here. If I want it that badly, why haven't I gotten it?" Logically, either my conviction was erroneous, or I didn't really want the career.

At that moment, I realized that that was it. I didn't really want an acting career, and that's why I hadn't gotten it. In that instant, it was as though the weight of the world lifted from my shoulders. I'd had no idea what a burden my talent had become. I'd been driven by it. But at that moment, I just said, "Well, I don't really want acting." And the burden was gone.

One of the things that occurred to me then was that if I did learn what Lester had to teach, and got freer, that somehow my life, too, would make a difference. This idea had also been involved in my acting.

The main attraction for me in acting was to share, to be able to say to people, "You're not alone. I know how you feel. I know how you feel when your husband leaves you, or when your little dog dies, or when your child gets in trouble, or when you win the lottery. See, I know all those things so well, that... well, watch me. I'm going to stand up here on this stage and show you that I understand how you feel. You are not alone. Come on, take my hand and we'll journey together down this road, and I'll show you that somebody else knows and understands."

I saw that that was why I wanted to act. That was always why. It was a sharing. When I let go of the acting ambition, I still had the desire to share something of what I was with other people. I wanted to move out to them somehow and say, "I understand." And have it, one way or another, be of some help.

So I thought that learning from Lester and joining him could fulfill that, because it was evident to me that what he was doing made a difference. It had made a very real difference to the people I'd met who knew him; it had made a tremendous difference to me. And the realization that my intention had somewhat paralleled his, also made the decision easy. In fact, by the time I got to deciding, it was the easiest and most joyful thing in the world.

So when Lester told me of some property that was available in Sedona, I reserved an acre and began making plans to sell my house and move to Arizona.

January 25, 1974 was the day Eric, my mother and I finally left New Jersey and headed west. Richard was an adult by then and decided to stay in New York. It was five years since I had first met Lester in December 1968, and I felt like a totally different person. The external changes in my life were obvious, but it was hard to pinpoint the internal ones. I had a strong sense of being more secure

and more confident of the future, along with the feeling that I could handle whatever happened. I was very happy.

Within two weeks of our arrival, Eric was in school and I was working. Then, one day in early March, Lester called to ask if I would be interested in a course he was going to give.

"I want to train some of you to be counselors, to enable you to help others so you can share what you've gained. It will be very good for your own growth also."

"Hooray!" I said. "I'll be there."

The class was set to meet twice a week for a month at the ranch. The participants were six women currently living at the cottage and Kathy and me from town. We were all very excited at the possibilities of this new venture.

Lester had Amelia to help him with the class. She was a counselor from Los Angeles who had been working with him for some time, and her part was to pass on to us the details of what she had been doing. But the real course centered around what Lester was leading us to see. The sessions usually started out with Amelia presenting her information for a couple of hours, then Lester would come over from the ranch house and spend an hour or two with us. It was fascinating.

He was trying out with us a delineation of his teachings, structured in a way that enabled one to progress toward freedom and happiness without the necessity of always calling for help. In a way it was a do-it-yourself kit for others to do what he had done. Later, I was able to see the sheer genius in how he had laid it out, but at the time, there were some problems.

The major difficulty was that this seemed to be a threat to the old order of things where Lester was always on call; where he would give us his attention, listen, and solve our problems for us. I don't think any of us were consciously aware of this; on the surface we were very eager to learn; but I do believe this idea was there on a subconscious level. We presented a solid front of trying very hard but not really understanding the technique. All except Kathy. It was she who finally broke the deadlock.

She hadn't known Lester for very long, had not yet developed an attachment to his personal help, and was eager to learn all she could. So she quietly began to use what he was presenting in the classes, so much so that about a month after the meetings ended, Lester

announced to one and all that Kathy had made tremendous progress and had passed us all up. This immediately created a state of silent war between her and "us."

I was absolutely furious at the upstart! How dare she? The sheer nerve of it was just too much! I didn't even want to talk to her anymore!

I don't know how long this state of affairs continued with some of the others, but after about a week, I decided that I truly liked Kathy and that the hatred and resentment I felt toward her was not acceptable to me. It would therefore have to go. How I accomplished that is a little difficult to explain.

What I did was that every time I thought of Kathy, I made a point of being on the alert for that feeling of resentment and, each time I felt it, consciously made a decision to be finished with that feeling. Each time I did this, the resentment dissolved, and I felt better.

I kept this going steadily for three days before the realization hit me that the reason for all my anger was that, on some level, I thought I couldn't do it myself, that somehow she had done something I couldn't do. When I saw that, I had to laugh. How dumb could I be? Obviously the truth was just the opposite. If *she* could do it, that meant I could do it, too.

The major problem had been and still was that I was too attached to the personal guidance I had been getting from Lester and was subconsciously afraid that if I could actually do it on my own, he wouldn't be available to me anymore. I saw that, for my own growth, I would have to let that attachment go. When I did, for the first time I began to understand something he'd talked about many times. Over the years, Lester had noticed that many people would make substantial gains toward freedom when they were with him but, for the most part, they were not continuing the forward movement on their own, away from him. This caused their progress to be sporadic and uneven.

In addition, those who relied on him over a long period of time developed a stubborn resistance and when that happened, their progress slowed considerably or even stopped altogether. He was unable to help them further.

Upon asking himself why this happened, he realized that if people need props, it inhibits their growth. Being inherently all powerful, they unconsciously resent the help even though, on a conscious

level, they say they want it. It had become clear to him that it was necessary for people to know they could achieve freedom on their own, without needing to rely on anyone. That was the reason he was designing his system in a way that enabled people to learn it and use it on their own initiative, at their own pace, and without needing anyone or anything outside themselves. When people are self-motivated and not being pushed, their progress can be rapid and easy.

Once I saw this, I began at once to use Lester's new, simple, more effective way of letting go of the negative feelings which were blocking my happiness and well being, and I discovered it was better than anything else I'd ever done. I was like a kid with a new toy. I had more happiness and more energy than ever before in my life. I continued to use the technique as much as I could, all the time, in every situation. And it was so easy! I didn't have to wait until I got home to meditate; I didn't have to look for a phone to call Lester; whenever anything happened that was a problem or that I felt badly about, I was able to correct it immediately and move on. What freedom! What joy! And it kept getting better all the time.

Then in August, Lester asked me if I would like to start teaching classes. I really had to think about it, because even though it was something I wanted very much to do, I still felt inadequate about teaching. I certainly hadn't achieved Lester's degree of freedom and I didn't know if I would be able to convey to others what I'd learned. After many discussions with Lester and much soul-searching and encouragement from him, I finally said yes.

I began teaching in September 1974. It was a small class of three people, and I was still a bit nervous, but when I sat down with that first class, I took a moment to release my feelings. Then I thought. "Well, there's no way to go but up. Here they are, here I am, and please God, we'll make it together."

I took a deep breath and started.

I needn't have worried. By continuing to use Lester's technique myself, in and out of the classroom, I have been very successful at sharing it. In fact, I'm still doing it and over the years all my early doubts have been laid to rest.

The results have proven our claims for this dynamic technique. People can change their lives once they know they no longer have to be burdened with the heaviness of their negative feelings and thoughts. Some come to the class in despair, others are struggling to attain goals, still others are high achievers who have everything but satisfaction. And soon, often within hours, most find within themselves reserves of strength and goodness and happiness they had thought permanently lost. There are often outbursts of laughter as they, like Lester, discover the colossal joke they've played on themselves. The joke is—as Lester says again and again—

> "You can have, be, and do whatever you will or desire. The only thing stopping you is the accumulation of negative thoughts and feelings which you are subconsciously holding. Remove those, and you remove the blocks to your accomplishing whatever you wish in life.
>
> "Remove those, and you will find happiness, satisfaction, and joy beyond your wildest dreams.
>
> "Remove those, and you are free."

# *Afterword*

Our organization is now called Sedona Institute. The format of the course has evolved somewhat over the years but the technique itself has remained the same. There's been no reason to change that. It's simple and complete . . . and it works.

In the beginning, we presented the course only in Sedona and Phoenix and quite a few people came from New York and Los Angeles to take it. Then, in January of 1976, Lester and I traveled to New York City to give a class to six people who had heard of it from our New York graduates. We thought we might do a few classes there, then go back to Sedona but, as it turned out, each group had friends and family who wanted it themselves when they saw the new-found energy and happiness of the graduates. Consequently, we stayed on and still have an office at the corner of 76th Street and Madison Avenue in Manhattan.

Our main office since 1981 is in Phoenix, Arizona and we send teachers to other cities, too; Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, Washington D.C., Seattle, Portland, Chicago, and elsewhere. Wherever a group of people want the Sedona Method, we will go.

We have advanced seminars available too, to graduates of our basic course, and hold some of those in beautiful Sedona itself. The town is still very peaceful and especially conducive to introspection and personal growth. Some years ago, Lester acquired thirty acres of land outside of town and is currently involved in designing a teaching center he will soon build there.

It has been an increasingly productive and joyous time for me, these years since I met Lester and it keeps getting better all the time. I've learned so much about myself and life and the deepest meaning of freedom. I had always wanted to be free, not knowing what it was or how to achieve it. I see it now as a personal choice. We can continue to be provoked, bothered, motivated, and driven by our negative feelings of anger, grief, fear, guilt, and so on.

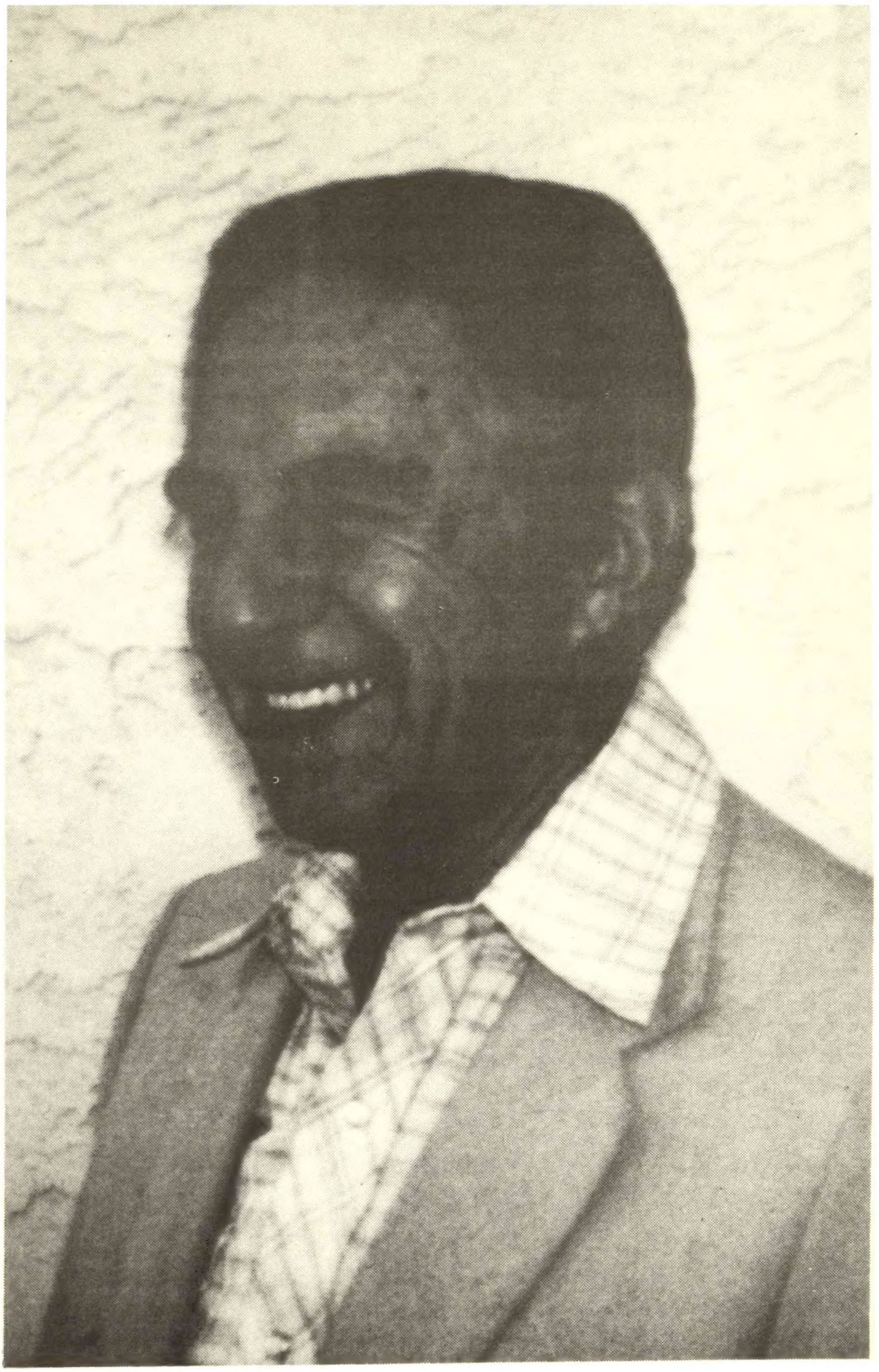
Or we can choose to let go of all that and be happy, motivated only by what we wish to accomplish and by what is correct and appropriate in each individual circumstance. I've discovered that there are no pat answers which apply for everyone. There are differences in people and the variety of combinations is endless.

But I've also discovered that there is an inherent goodness underneath all the superficial acquisitions of negativity. I've discovered it in myself, although it is not wholly pure, even yet.

I've discovered it in every other person, too. It is in seed, waiting for the right combination of sunshine and rain to make it germinate, grow and blossom. The Sedona Method has provided that delicate balance to many, many people and I've loved being a part of it. It is my pleasure, my joy and my privilege to garden in such fertile soil.

Thank you, Lester.

P.S. If you would like to have this method for yourself, you can call or write the Sedona Institute. We'll be happy to hear from you.



For information about classes in the Sedona Method, write or call:

**Registration Department**
**Sedona Institute**

**SEDONA INSTITUTE**
1645 East Missouri Ave. Ste. 110
Phoenix, AZ 85016
(602) 264-0123

# What people say about Lester's Sedona Method...

*"It occurs to me that if Cain had had the Sedona Method before calling on his brother, Abel, he would have changed the course of human destiny. And so it is with this "Aladdin's Lamp" that so dramatically changed the course and the essence of Lester's life, sensitively relived in this warm and inspiring description of one man's unwillingness to say "die."*

*In a transitory world of too-fast food and too-quick cures, it is easy to react cynically to anything that claims to erase your miseries. But, from all accounts and appearances, the Sedona Method seems to do just that by supplying the crucial "tool" that is yours forever. My wife, Shirley Jones, and I have found it to be extremely helpful.*

*Virginia Lloyd has told of Lester's precious gift and has, in turn, given us one too."*

Marty Ingels
Hollywood Producer
President of Ingels, Inc.

Shirley Jones
Academy Award
winning actress

*"In years of interviewing in the area of human relationships, and all kinds of methodologies, the only one that I think was practical and really worked and worked quickly is the Sedona Method. It helps me tremendously, very quickly, when things get tough. That says a lot!"*

Sally Jessy Raphael
Nationally syndicated counselor on over 200 radio and television stations

*"I took the Sedona Method because I was under a lot of business and personal pressure. I find now that I'm more relaxed, easier in all my relationships and making a lot more money with much less effort—working smarter, not harder."*

Senior Vice President of a major investment banking firm

## About the Author

Virginia Lloyd is Director of Training for the Sedona Institute, a non-profit, educational organization founded by Lester Levenson. She has worked personally with Lester since 1968 and has been teaching the Basic Sedona Method Course since 1974. She trains and works with teachers and designs and conducts the graduate advanced courses.

Ms. Lloyd has conducted classes in the Sedona Method at many of the top Fortune 500 Corporations for their executives and management. In addition, she has appeared on radio and television as spokeswoman for the Sedona Method.

Ms. Lloyd makes her home in Sedona, Arizona but spends much of her time in Phoenix, the main office of the Sedona Institute.

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